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Contemporary British Dramatists, Volume L :

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

PLAYS BY NOEL COWARD

EAST VIRTUE. (2nd Impression.)

HAT FEVER. (3rd Impression.)

FALLEN ANGELS. (2nd Impression.)

THE VORTEX. (3rd Impression.)

THE RAT TRAP.

THREE PLAYS. (*The Rat Trap. The Vortex. Fallen Angels.*) *With the Author's reply to his Critics.* (2nd Impression.)

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

A ROMANCE IN THREE ACTS

By NOEL COWARD



LONDON
ERNEST BENN LIMITED

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TO
G. B. STERN
WITHOUT WHOM.

The Queen was in the Parlour was produced in London by Basil Dean at the St. Martin's Theatre on August 24th, 1926.

The characters are named in the order of their appearance.

NADYA	MADGE TITHERADGE
SABIEN	FRANCIS LISTER
ZANA	FREDA GODFREY
GENERAL KRISH	C. M. HALLARD
MISS PHIPPS	ADA KING
COURT USHER	ROEBUCK DISNEY
PRINCE KERI OF ZALGAR	HERBERT MARSHALL
THE GRAND DUCHESS EMILIE OF ZALGAR	LADY TREE

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

NADYA

ZANA, *her Maid*

MISS PHIPPS, *her Secretary*

THE GRAND DUCHESS EMILIE OF ZALGAR

PRINCE KERI OF ZALGAR

GENERAL KRISH

SABIEN PASTAL

ACT I, SCENE I—NADYA's *flat in Paris.*

SCENE 2—*The same a few hours later.*

ACT II, SCENE—NADYA's *private apartments in the Royal Palace of Krayia. A year later.*

ACT III, SCENE I—*The same as Act II.*

SCENE 2—*The same, a few hours later.*

ACT I

SCENE I

A small but expensively furnished flat in Paris. When curtain rises the stage is empty. It is about five o'clock a.m., and the coming dawn is already creeping through the shutters. There comes the sound of voices and the outer door opening. NADYA and SABIEN come in—they both appear to be a little bit draggled. NADYA is extremely beautiful, her frock is exquisite but slightly exaggerated. SABIEN is in full evening dress; his tie is crumpled and his hair very ruffled.

NADYA switches on the lights and flings off her cloak.

NADYA: What a party! I'm nearly dead—— (*She yawns.*)

SABIEN: Don't have these beastly electric lights—it's dawn outside—let's pull up the blinds and watch it.

NADYA: Wait till I've powdered my nose. (*She powders her nose and reddens her lips.*)

[SABIEN pulls up the blinds and opens the windows and shutters.]

SABIEN: There—that's better.

NADYA (*blinking*): Oh! it's divine, isn't it? And *how* unbecoming!

SABIEN (*laughing a trifle stupidly*): Artificial—exotic—orchid, that's what you are—artificial—exotic——

NADYA: Do you know, Sabien, I believe you're a little bit “tight” still!

SABIEN: Don't be silly, dear.

NADYA (*giggling*): I'm not silly—but you *are*——

SABIEN: I'm damned tired—I know that all right.

NADYA (*still giggling*): I know what made me laugh more than anything else to-night—poor old Julie's dress—it looked as though she'd been to bed in it constantly for the last year.

SABIEN (*giggling too*): Agony—that's all—sheer agony!

NADYA: And oh, my God! when she sang “*Toi que J'Aime*” all over Maurice Normand——

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[She lolls backwards and forwards, helpless between laughter, a little too much champagne and extreme weariness. NADYA goes to window.]

SABIEN: Agony—that's all—sheer agony!

NADYA (*at the window*): Paris is so fresh and clean in the early morning, isn't it?

SABIEN: Frightfully. (*He joins her at the window.*)

NADYA: Virginal.

SABIEN: Don't be silly, dear.

NADYA: But it is. You don't understand.

SABIEN: You have such lovely thoughts, darling.

NADYA: You always laugh at my mania for Paris. It's horrid of you.

SABIEN: I love it too, really. After all, I met you here.

NADYA: Thank you, dear. That's better.

SABIEN: Oh, God!

NADYA: What's the matter?

SABIEN: Nothing. Happiness takes one's breath away sometimes, doesn't it?

NADYA: Look at the market carts.

SABIEN: I often try for hours to separate my passion for you from my love for you—it's terribly difficult.

NADYA: Those darling horses—they look so bored.

SABIEN: Because love lasts and passion doesn't.

NADYA: I do hope the Empress Eugenie liked the Eiffel Tower as much as I do.

SABIEN: You know it doesn't.

NADYA: What doesn't what?

SABIEN: Don't be tiresome, Nadya. I said passion doesn't last, and you went meandering on about the Empress Eugenie.

NADYA: Nothing lasts—that's why life is such an extremely poor joke

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SABIEN: Don't say things like that.

NADYA: Why not?

SABIEN: I can't bear it.

NADYA: You shouldn't start talking about what will last and what won't—it's waste of time—precious time.

SABIEN: We've got æons of time.

NADYA: Have we?

SABIEN: If you don't tire of me.

NADYA: Idiot.

SABIEN: I mean it. You might, you know. You're very temperamental.

NADYA: Shut up, darling.

SABIEN: You insulted Elise to-night.

NADYA: Well, she annoyed me.

SABIEN: Darling. Darling. Darling.

NADYA: She's got sweetbreads instead of brains.

SABIEN: You're so didactic and imperious.

NADYA (*turning away*): Shut up, Sabien.

SABIEN: Why—angel—what's the matter?

NADYA: Shall I go and make some coffee?

SABIEN: Yes, do. I'll help.

NADYA: No, you won't—you make such a row over everything, you stay here—admiring the sunrise. I shan't be a minute. (*She rises.*)

SABIEN (*also rising and leaning against the window*): Wouldn't it be awful if I hurled myself out of the window?

NADYA: Yes, awful, and very stupid. (*She takes up her cloak and goes out.*)

SABIEN (*thinking she is still there*): I should never have the courage to commit suicide, whatever happened. I wonder what it feels like exactly—the actual moment when everything stops! I

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don't suppose it feels like anything at all—but still—— (*He turns round.*) Oh, I thought you were there!

[*Re-enter NADYA.*]

NADYA: What, dear?

SABIEN: I thought you were still in the room. I've been talking for hours—all about suicide.

NADYA: What fun!

SABIEN (*pensively*): It's awfully interesting, you know—wondering whether there's going to be an after life! And if so, what it will be like.

NADYA: I haven't finished wondering what this life's going to be like yet—without looking further ahead.

SABIEN: You never look ahead at all—live for a day—just like a butterfly—a careless——

NADYA: Do stop comparing me to things—I'm not a bit like an orchid, or a butterfly——

SABIEN: Don't snap at me. What an evil temper you've got——

NADYA (*smiling*): I don't look ahead, mainly because I'm so happy and content with now!

SABIEN: Angel! (*He yawns.*) Ugh! I'm so sleepy.

NADYA: Sit down, darling, and don't go on mumbling—you'll only wake Zana. I'm going to put the coffee on the thing now.

SABIEN: What thing?

NADYA: The gas thing, of course.

[*She goes out. SABIEN takes a cigarette out of a lacquer box, lights it, and sinks on to the couch. He puts his feet up and hums a little tune. Re-enter NADYA with a tray on which are two cups and saucers and a sugar-basin.*]

Zana anticipated us; she had it all prepared, except for the heating.

SABIEN: Three days more. Isn't it marvellous?

NADYA (*looking down at him*): Yes, it is.

SABIEN: Kiss me.

NADYA: Why should I?

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SABIEN: Because you love me.

NADYA: Such a commonplace reason, isn't it? (*She bends down and kisses him.*) There!

[*He holds her down.*]

No, darling—let me go now—don't be so tiresome! (*She struggles free.*)

SABIEN: Are you looking forward to being married again?

NADYA: Yes, my first experience was such a shrieking success.

SABIEN: I shan't behave like Alex.

NADYA: You couldn't. Nobody could! That thought was always one of my greatest comforts.

SABIEN: I can't imagine how you ever stood it.

NADYA: Well, don't try. It's silly to drag beastly memories of the past into a present—like this!

(*She strokes his hair with her left hand and helps herself to a cigarette with her right.*)

SABIEN: It is wonderful. (*Striking a match.*) Here.

NADYA: Thanks, dear.

SABIEN (*complacently leaning back again*): I love you—I love you—I love you.

NADYA: Thanks, dear.

SABIEN: Now you say it.

NADYA (*absently pinning up a bit of straying hair*): I love you—I love you—I love you.

SABIEN: Thanks, dear.

NADYA (*thoughtfully*): And I wonder why——

SABIEN (*laughing*): Because I possess perfect looks, in addition to every manly virtue.

NADYA (*seriously*): I didn't mean that. I meant I wonder why all this happiness should come to me—just now. I haven't deserved it.

SABIEN (*drily*): My dear, you deserve everything in the world for having put up with Alex for those three years.

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NADYA: No—but since then—I haven't deserved anything. I've been so silly and shallow and cheap.

SABIEN: Now for Heaven's sake don't start abasing yourself—it's a positive mania with you—especially after parties.

NADYA: Yes, I always feel worse about everything—after parties.

SABIEN: So do most people.

NADYA: . . . And it's not only to *us* that I've been silly and cheap! We have such elastic senses of values. To the world—the real respectable, decent world—I've been flagrantly immoral.

SABIEN (*smiling*): I love "flagrantly."

NADYA: Oh, Sabien, don't laugh at me! You see, I honestly wish I hadn't.

SABIEN: Wish you hadn't what?

NADYA: Lived like I have since Alex died.

SABIEN: Don't say it in that reckless way as though——

NADYA: Well——

SABIEN: I know.

NADYA: It's so strange of you to know, and to be so dear about it.

SABIEN: What is it to me, anyway? Your past! As long as I may have the future.

NADYA: I've read that in a book.

SABIEN: Of course you have. A romance! Oh, Nadya, isn't it amazing that however cynical and disillusioned one may feel oneself to be, the first moment that Love starts there's Romance and Glamour bobbing up again as though they'd never been downed.

NADYA: They never can be downed really—if you have the right sort of mind.

SABIEN (*excitedly*): But real romance, Nadya! I'm filled with it now, and all because of you. I'd like to do wonderful deeds for you——

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NADYA: Yes.

SABIEN: Fight for you——!

NADYA: Lovely.

SABIEN: Carry you away on a horse——!

NADYA (*firmly*): No.

SABIEN: All right—horse out!

NADYA (*laughing*): You are absurd——

SABIEN: No—it's horrible of you to damp me—I could work myself up into a frenzy of idealistic heroism over you. I'd die for you——

NADYA: Don't say that—it's so silly, dear.

SABIEN: No it isn't—it's true!

NADYA (*rising*): Anyhow, the kitchen is probably now entirely flooded with coffee.

[*She goes out. SABIEN rolls over on the couch and buries his face in a cushion. NADYA comes in again with the coffee-pot.*]

I do hope it doesn't taste burnt. (*She pours it out.*)

SABIEN (*talking into the cushion*): Umm—umm—umm——

NADYA: What did you say?

SABIEN (*sitting up*): I said it probably does.

NADYA: Well, drink it and see.

SABIEN (*taking cup*): Drink yours at the same time.

NADYA: Very well—wait a moment. (*She takes her cup from the table.*) Now.

[*They both drink—and sigh with relief.*]

It's all right.

SABIEN: Excellent. What are you going to do to-morrow?

NADYA: You mean to-day.

SABIEN: Yes—to-day.

NADYA: I shall sleep until lunch-time—then I shall come and fetch you in the car, and we'll eat a little—just a very little at

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Laperouse—then a short drive in the Bois, and then I shall have to go and be fitted.

SABIEN: You never stop being fitted.

NADYA: I shall then come back and rest so as to be in the right mood to enjoy *Louise*. I adore *Louise*. I shall clutch your arm and cry happily—and look dreadful for the rest of the evening.

SABIEN: And then we shall be one more day nearer.

NADYA: Yes, one more day nearer.

SABIEN: Will you ever want to go back to Krayia again—after we're married?

NADYA: Perhaps—some day. I was unhappy there, but with you I shall be able to face every memory and laugh. And it *is* a beautiful country.

SABIEN: It sounds lovely—from what you've said, here and there. I want to see it.

NADYA: The hills are perfect, and the woods—like English woods in spring, with bluebells and primroses—and the people are fun too. They wear weird clothes—specially in the little villages—bright colours, and thick awful shoes. I used to go with Aunt Tania driving, and they'd all cheer and curtsy and throw flowers into the carriage.

SABIEN: She was the Queen, wasn't she?

NADYA: Yes. If only she'd lived a little longer, everything would have been different.

SABIEN: You mean about Alex?

NADYA: Yes. My stepmother would never have been able to have forced the marriage—as she did. I could have appealed against it. Aunt Tania was awfully fond of me. It would all have been so much better. I should have married some nice worthy young man and led a moderately uninteresting social life. With occasional children to vary the monotony, I should never have suffered—and broken away—and been—well—like this!

SABIEN: Oh, but I'm so glad you suffered, and broke away.

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NADYA: So am I—now.

SABIEN: I hope you'll never develop into a stickler for etiquette. After all, you're Royal blood! I shall have to obey you always.

NADYA: I've disowned my country—or rather it's disowned me—at least I should think so. I haven't heard any news for so long. Krish writes so seldom.

SABIEN: Krish?

NADYA: I told you all about him. My greatest friend, all through my childhood—all my life, really. Being away for however long doesn't make any difference to that sort of friendship. He's the only one in Krayia who knows the truth about Alex.

SABIEN: And he's always kept in touch with you?

NADYA: Yes, until just lately. I shall probably hear from him again soon.

SABIEN: But didn't anyone else know how Alex treated you?

NADYA: Only his family, and my stepmother, and they pretended not to.

SABIEN: Tell me all about it.

NADYA (*laughing*): You're dreadful, Sabien. I tell you I've put it all behind me—for ever.

SABIEN: Go on, tell me.

NADYA: Have some more coffee?

SABIEN: Tell me all about how awful it was—and how ill-treated you were—and I'll sympathise too beautifully, and kiss you, and lay the ghosts once and for all.

NADYA: I was ill-fated—from the first—everything went wrong.

SABIEN: Splendid—what a good beginning!

NADYA (*grandiloquently*): Fate placed rather a dirty thumb upon the pulse of my career!

SABIEN: Luscious.

NADYA: Bad fairies arrived in motor-bus loads at my christening.

SABIEN: Excellent.

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NADYA: And then my wedding! Oh, Sabien, my wedding! How you'd have laughed. There was an enormous fuss made all over the country—general holiday and everything, and a children's battle of flowers, and a torchlight procession in the evening. It had all been arranged—the custom in Krayia. I'd only met Alex three times. My picture was all over the place, leering up from fancy biscuit boxes and glaring down from hoardings. One fearful one with a squint.

SABIEN: How encouraging!

NADYA: It didn't matter to me—I was beyond that—I'd seen myself in the glass. I don't mind dwelling for hours on the horrid tragedies of my life—but don't—don't ask me to describe my wedding dress. I was decked with heirlooms like a Christmas-trec. I looked quite hard and thick—it would have been quite possible to lift off my head and find chocolates in my neck, done up in silver paper!

SABIEN: My poor darling!

NADYA: But I was awfully popular, Sabien. The people loved me—and they wouldn't now. I've changed, you see.

SABIEN: Thank God for it!

NADYA: Alex was a great favourite too, tall and soldierly and good-looking—everything that was required. We went away to the mountains for our honeymoon.

SABIEN: Wasn't he in love with you at all?

NADYA: No, not at all—but that didn't matter—nobody took it into consideration.

SABIEN: They wouldn't.

NADYA: On the first night we dined together Alex got drunk and I got panic-stricken. It must have been awfully funny. He began playing pretend games—beastly pretend games—that I was his slave or something, then he tried to chase me round the room, but I wouldn't run—I just giggled and giggled from sheer nerves and terror. And it irritated him—not unnaturally. He wanted me to play up and scream. Then he started to frighten me with awful

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stories—ghosts and murders and things—and my heart stopped still inside me and I went on giggling—like a half-wit!

SABIEN: What a brute!

NADYA: We went back to Rodelle—the capital—after our celestial honeymoon. And we entertained a lot. You know—dreadful formalities and etiquette—I loathed it. Alex continued with an unbroken succession of mistresses, some of which—the high-born ones—I was compelled to meet. They used to sneer at me behind their eyes and imagine I couldn't see.

SABIEN: But surely people must have guessed?

NADYA: Perhaps they did. But Alex was so good-looking and such a sportsman!

SABIEN: I see.

NADYA (*slowly*): Perhaps I was being prepared—prepared for something that is yet to come. There's nothing in the world like suffering for giving you a grip on things.

SABIEN: What nonsense you talk—there'll never be anything more you need be prepared for now—only happiness—perfect happiness. I'll see to that.

NADYA: I wonder.

SABIEN: Well, don't. It's foolish.

NADYA: I felt a little shiver then, it's all so warm and secure here, and the sun's just rising—but I felt a little shiver.

SABIEN: You're cold.

NADYA (*smiling*): No—not that sort of shiver.

SABIEN: We won't go to Krayia after all—even when we're married, it would make you too sad.

NADYA (*looking down*): Perhaps it would—but all the same I should like to—one day. You see, I was born there, and—and—oh well, I feel as though it belonged to me—or I belonged to it—or something!

SABIEN: Anyhow, I've got a plan.

NADYA: What sort of plan?

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SABIEN: Let's carry out the day more or less as arranged, but instead of driving in the Bois after lunch—let's be married—straight away.

NADYA: But, my dear, we *can't*! Nothing's ready.

SABIEN: Nothing has to be, really—except us.

NADYA: Everyone will be furious if we do it secretly; they're all looking forward to Thursday, and the party.

SABIEN: Well, I'm not. I'm a little sick of parties, and everybody we know flocking around us. I'd much sooner get it over quietly and go away with you alone.

NADYA (*suddenly*): Yes. We will! We'll do that. There'll have to be witnesses.

SABIEN: Suzanne, of course.

NADYA: Yes, we'll call her up early.

SABIEN: And Maurice. He'd be so hurt if he weren't in it.

NADYA: I shan't go to bed at all.

SABIEN: Either shall I.

NADYA: We'll go straight off afterwards and leave them to do the explaining.

SABIEN: Excellent—they'll love that.

NADYA: It's going to be a lovely day, too—look at it.

SABIEN: The traffic's just beginning.

NADYA: Everything's just beginning.

SABIEN: Let's ring up Suzanne now.

NADYA: It's six o'clock! Dare we?

SABIEN: I must—I simply must tell somebody or I shall go mad.

NADYA: She'll be furious! Dear Suzanne.

SABIEN: Livid! Dear Suzanne.

NADYA: Go on then.

SABIEN (*he takes up telephone and sits on edge of table*): Hallo—hallo—Elysee 1845—yes, 1845. She'll be in a deep thick sleep. The telephone's in her room, isn't it?

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NADYA: Yes, by the bed. (*With relish.*) The bell going off in her ear like that will probably frighten her to death.

SABIEN: Does she sleep with her mouth open?

NADYA: I don't know—why?

SABIEN: I had an aunt once who always slept with her mouth open and somebody woke her up suddenly and she nearly bit her tongue off. (*He laughs.*)

NADYA: How awful! (*She laughs too.*)

SABIEN: To bite one's tongue is one of the most painful things in the world. (*He shakes with laughter.*)

NADYA (*giggling helplessly*): Oh, do stop, Sabien!

SABIEN (*with the telephone shaking in his hand*): I can't—I've got weak——!

NADYA: Do stop—Suzanne will be so cross.

SABIEN (*hysterically*): Here she is! Is that you, Suzanne? (*He nods.*) It's her—Suzanne—I—we——! (*He breaks off into peals of laughter.*)

NADYA (*trying to control herself*): Give it to me, for Heaven's sake. (*She snatches the telephone out of his hand.*) Is that you, Suzanne?

SABIEN: Judging by her voice, she's bitten *her* tongue right off!

NADYA: Listen, Suzanne—we——

[*She too breaks off into helpless laughter. They both stand there shaking.*]

It's no use—I can't say a word! (*She puts the receiver on and collapses into a chair.*)

SABIEN (*wiping his eyes*): She'll never speak to us again.

NADYA: Never. We've offended her for life.

SABIEN: Our best friend.

NADYA: Isn't it dreadful?

SABIEN: Dreadful!

[*They both laugh again. The telephone bell rings.*]

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NADYA: There now! That's her!

SABIEN: Furious! Who's going to explain?

NADYA (*still laughing*): I'd better. (*She goes to the telephone.*) Hallo! Yes, Suzanne. Oh, darling, don't be so cross—no, really. (*To SABIEN.*) She's in a rage! (*To SUZANNE.*) I was only telling Sabien that you were in a rage, dear.—Yes, you are. I can hear your teeth chattering with fury. Well, listen—you must let us explain.—No, not in the least—he's as sober as a judge!—Because we have some important news for you—yes, frightfully important. We're going to be married to-day instead of Thursday.—Exactly.—We can't wait.—Don't be so nasty, Suzanne! Well, will you be a witness?—It doesn't matter in the least—no one will see you.—All right then, your blue. Can you get hold of Maurice?—Yes, that will do splendidly. Laperouse at one o'clock.—All right—I shall be in till eleven, angel.—Good-bye. (*She hangs up receiver.*) She is a darling! Oh, Sabien, isn't it all divine?

SABIEN: Divine! To-day! I knew I shouldn't be able to exist until Thursday.

NADYA (*excitedly*): What's the time?

SABIEN: Quarter-past six

NADYA: I must wake up Zana. Have you got all the necessary papers—licences and things?

SABIEN: Yes, everything. I'll go back now and have a bath and change.

NADYA: Listen! Pick me up here at twelve. I simply must do a little shopping.

SABIEN (*taking her in his arms*): You see, this is probably the most perfect moment in the whole world—standing here alone with you, on the threshold of everything that's new and wonderful. Let's drink to our happiness!

NADYA: Darling, what a contented thing to do!

SABIEN: Never mind, if it is contented; a gesture of that sort gives one a lovely feeling. Where's the drink?

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NADYA: I'll get it. Take two glasses out of the dining-room.
(*She runs off.*)

SABIEN: All right. (*He goes off and returns in a moment with two glasses.*)

NADYA (*off*): Come and open the bottle, dear.

[*He goes off again. After a second's pause they both come on together with a bottle of champagne.*]

SABIEN: Here are the glasses.

NADYA: I'll pour it out—let me pour it out. Open the windows wide——

SABIEN (*opening both windows*): There—we'll stand in this glorious warm patch of sunlight.

NADYA: And drink to our happiness. (*She holds up her glass.*)

SABIEN (*holding up his glass*): Our own dear happiness—together—always.

[*They both drink.*]

The sun's gone in. How tactless of it!

NADYA (*defiantly*): It doesn't matter! (*She dashes her glass to the ground.*)

SABIEN: It doesn't matter. (*He does the same, and takes her in his arms.*)

CURTAIN.

SCENE 2

A few hours later. When curtain rises ZANA is tidying up the room.

NADYA is heard singing in the bath-room. There comes a ring at the front door bell. ZANA goes off and opens the door. Enter

GENERAL KRISH.

KRISH: Your mistress is up already?

ZANA: Yes, sir.

KRISH: I must see her at once—it's very important.

ZANA: I'll tell her, sir.

KRISH: You remember me, Zana?

ZANA: Yes, sir.

KRISH: You haven't changed much, Zana.

ZANA: No, sir.

KRISH: Is your mistress well? Has she been happy all this time?

ZANA: Yes, sir. *(She bursts into tears.)*

KRISH *(quickly)*: What's the matter? Why are you crying?

ZANA *(controlling herself)*: I beg your pardon, sir, I'm so frightened that—that—you're bringing bad news.

KRISH: Very strange news—not all bad.

ZANA *(haltingly)*: She is to be married to-day.

KRISH: What!

ZANA: At two o'clock.

KRISH: Married—married! To whom, Zana?

ZANA: Mr. Pastal. Mr. Sabien Pastal.

KRISH: Sabien Pastal!

ZANA: They're very happy, sir. They love one another so much.

KRISH: Tell her I'm here, Zana.

ZANA: Yes, sir.

[ZANA goes out. KRISH goes to the window and looks out.

ZANA re-enters.

Madame will be with you in a moment, sir.

KRISH: Thank you.

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[ZANA goes out. KRISH sees a large photograph of SABIEN in a frame; he bends down to scrutinise it. Enter NADYA. She is attired in an exquisite bath-wrap. Her face is set with apprehension.

NADYA: Krish!—Krish!

KRISH: My dear. (*He kisses her hands.*)

NADYA: It's so many years. Why didn't you let me know you were coming?

KRISH: There wasn't time.

NADYA: Tell me why you're here—suddenly—like this?

KRISH: I have news for you.

NADYA: From Krayia?

KRISH: Yes.

NADYA: It's no use bringing me news of Krayia—I've—I've forgotten Krayia.

KRISH: Have you?

NADYA: Yes. All that part of my life is finished for ever—I'm to be married to-day—I'm deeply in love. Oh, Krish, don't look at me like that. What has happened?

KRISH: You must summon together all your courage, Nadya. That splendid courage I've seen you display so often in the past. There's been a break in Krayia—a break in the line of succession. Your presence is absolutely necessary.

NADYA: My presence! Why—what do you mean?

KRISH: The King's brother died six months ago—you remember?

NADYA: Yes, yes—you wrote to me.

KRISH: There was to have been a marriage between the King and Mahlia of Styre quite soon. Styre is rich, and there would probably have been an heir to strengthen the entente between the two countries in the future.

NADYA: Yes?

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

KRISH: The King was assassinated four days ago.

NADYA: Assassinated! Michael assassinated!

KRISH: Yes. There had been a little trouble among the people—nothing very much—just a few riots down by the river and a public demonstration or two. There are always agitators and revolutionary fanatics of some sort working all the time. Michael has never been really popular, but we hoped the marriage would alter all that. He was ambushed when walking in the garden after dinner of Friday night and stabbed to death.

NADYA: Oh, how horrible! How horrible!

KRISH: The Salic Law still exists in Krayia. You are next.

NADYA: Krish, don't—don't say it——

KRISH: You are the Queen now—by right of succession—it's unalterable.

[There is a slight pause. Then NADYA laughs a trifle hysterically.]

NADYA: There you are, you see! I knew it!—But it's all right—it's quite all right—I've thought it out just this minute. I can't be Queen, Krish—not possibly—because I'm dead.—You arrived here and found that I had died weeks ago. You see, it's quite easy, isn't it?

KRISH (*shakes his head*): No.

NADYA: But it is! No one need ever know. I'll leave France to-day for England or America. It would be impossible to trace me under my married name—my married name—— (*Her voice breaks.*)

KRISH: My dear, don't—please don't——

NADYA (*wildly*): Give me this loophole—let me escape——

KRISH: My dear, you must control yourself.

NADYA: Control myself! Must my whole life be given over to controlling myself?

KRISH: Yes.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

NADYA: Oh, you're not fair—you're not fair—you knew! You could have done something.

KRISH: There was nothing I could have done.

NADYA (*frantically*): I'll die rather than go back—I'll kill myself, d'you hear? Krish, in God's name—save me—help me to escape—you can't possibly understand what it means to me. I thought years ago that I should never be happy again, that all capacity for joy and contentment had been drained dry by the bitterness of my married life. Since then I've been searching—hoping against hope—until at last—now—within these last few weeks I've found what I was looking for. Sabien! He loves me, better than anyone or anything in the world, and I love him—passionately, desperately. Everything else has been swept away from me. I've found freedom and happiness for the first time in my life. Don't take them from me—don't take them from me—don't take them from me——!

[She has fallen on her knees sobbing hopelessly. KRISH strokes her hair sympathetically, then he raises her up on to the sofa beside him.]

KRISH (*gently*): Nadya, my dear—I've been travelling night and day—I'm so tired and hungry—could Zana make me a little breakfast?

NADYA: Oh, forgive me—yes, of course—you must be starving—Zana, Zana——

[She wipes her eyes and makes every effort to control her emotion. Re-enter ZANA.]

ZANA: Yes, madame?

NADYA: Some breakfast for the General—at once, as quickly as you can.

ZANA: What will you eat, sir?

KRISH: Anything—anything—some coffee.

ZANA: I'll make you an omelette.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

KRISH: Capital. An omelette would save my life. Thank you, Zana.

[*Exit ZANA.*]

NADYA: Forgive me, dear Krish, not only for neglecting you, but for behaving so stupidly. You must understand I've been up all night, and I'm rather tired too.

KRISH: You need never fear that I shall not understand—I know you so well.

NADYA: The old me perhaps, but I've changed a lot lately.

KRISH: Not really. You could never change.

NADYA: I'm fighting so hard now to be calm and face things. (*Her voice breaks.*) It's difficult——

KRISH (*taking her hand*): I know—I know.

NADYA: What am I to do?

KRISH: Cry, my dear—it will be a relief.

NADYA: No, I can't—there's no time—we must think of a plan quite quietly—something subtle that will put everything right.

KRISH: Don't batter yourself against the bars, it's useless. You must give in.

NADYA: I want to be ordinary and happy—just absolutely ordinary, with Sabien to love, and to love me. Why can't I be like other people with the right to control my Destiny—just a little?

KRISH: No one can control their Destiny—even other people.

NADYA: You're sitting there knowing for certain that I'm going to give in—aren't you?—aren't you?

KRISH: Yes, Nadya.

NADYA: You're wrong—I won't. If I had lived all the time in Krayia it would have been different. But I broke away—and that's altered everything. It's such a tiny little country—what can it matter really—in the end?

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

KRISH: It should matter to you most of all—you are the Queen.

NADYA (*rising suddenly*): Look at me—look at me! A fine Queen I should make—it's ridiculous. I've been to parties every night for the last months—some of them damned rowdy ones. I've been drunk several times—yes, drunk, and noisy. I've had lovers, like any of the other women. I went to Deauville with a beastly little Italian last year; we used to have disgusting scenes in the hotel and the Casino, and we lost every sou we had. Then he left me, and I consoled myself with an American—quite nice with wavy hair—— (*She laughs.*) Anyhow, there's nothing like being cosmopolitan. Perhaps I've been sub-consciously following the example set by my late lamented husband. God rest his soul! He'd have liked me much better as I am now than as I was then. I should understand and play up. I often think I may have misjudged Alex a bit; we might have had great fun if only I hadn't been so stupid! Poor old Alex——

KRISH: He was a cad and a libertine.

NADYA: Yes, wasn't he? Libertine describes him beautifully, and it's such a lovely word too. I'm a libertine as well now. I've had a wonderful time in Paris, Krish, all among the people who are just *not* received in polite society. You see they've nearly all started life high up and been knocked off their perches into the mud. Some of us dope, and some of us drink, and some of us merely go in for undiluted love in varying doses. Oh, it's all most amusing, and such an excellent finishing school for those destined to fill high positions, gives one the requisite grip on things, and that perfect control and dignity—— (*She breaks off suddenly.*) Oh, don't you see how utterly ludicrous it is? What absolute nonsense? Me Royal? Laugh with me, Krish, at the fantastic absurdity of it. A ruler of a country—the divine right of kings and queens—applied to me? Oh no. No! No! (*She turns away, still laughing, and brushes her eyes with the back of her hand.*)

KRISH: You haven't deceived me a bit—you haven't even deceived yourself.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

NADYA (*vehemently*): But it's true—it's all true—I've done these things. Did you think I was only acting to deceive you? It's true, I tell you.

KRISH: I know; I've known all along.

NADYA: Then you must see how completely out of the question it is. I'm entirely and absolutely unworthy to fill the throne of Krayia for a day——

KRISH: Krayia doesn't want your past, it wants your future.

NADYA (*passionately*): Oh, don't, don't! Sabien said that to me—just a short time ago.

KRISH: Sabien must be sacrificed.

NADYA: It's amazing—that cold detachment—Sabien must be sacrificed. Do you realise what those words mean to me? You're silly, standing there and saying things like that. Sabien must be sacrificed—Sabien must be sacrificed. Oh, Krish, why do you take up such a firm attitude? Why don't you come to my side for a little and think quite quietly and calmly? There may be a small loophole somewhere, if only we can find it.

KRISH (*sitting down and drawing her down beside him*): Come, then, we'll think. Have you any suggestions?

NADYA: What I said at first—you arrived here to find that I had died a few weeks ago.

KRISH: That could be proved untrue by the first Krayian newspaper man that cared to investigate.

NADYA: What would have happened if when you came in I was already married to Sabien?

KRISH: The marriage would have to be annulled.

NADYA: Why couldn't he reign with me?

KRISH: Mainly because the people wouldn't stand it for a moment. A commoner, and a foreigner at that.

NADYA: If I sit here and say "No" without anger or resentment or emotion, just "No" firmly, and stick to it, what then?

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

KRISH: You can't say "No."

NADYA: You're so sure.

KRISH: Yes, quite sure. You see, to be born Royal is to be born in a cage. And however well the bars may be concealed by trees and mountains and the roofs of Paris, they're there just the same always. Your country comes first. Even before Sabien, and love and happiness—you can't help yourself.

NADYA: The air is full of democracy and freedom.

KRISH: The air is full of the voices of cheap people, crying out against the existing order of things, trying to tear down kings and queens and loyalties and establish themselves on the throne in their shirt-sleeves with their feet on the mantelpiece.

[Re-enter ZANA with a breakfast tray which she places on a small table and carries it to the General.]

Thank you, Zana, that's simply splendid.

ZANA: There's more coffee when you want it, sir.

KRISH: Excellent!

[ZANA goes out. KRISH devotes himself comfortably to his breakfast.]

NADYA: What would be the use of me as Queen, without hope, or energy, or even love for my country?

KRISH: Love for your country is born in you; not all the ill-treatment and misery in the world can dispel it when it's ingrained.

NADYA: That all sounds very fine, but are you certain it's true?

KRISH: Absolutely certain.

NADYA: Certain that the love of my country will rise supreme in me and help me to rule my people well and truly and for the best?

KRISH: Yes. You will have a lot to fight too. As I told you, there are anarchists everywhere—working for revolution.

NADYA: They may assassinate me. That would be funny, after all your trouble!

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

KRISH (*drily*): Very funny.

NADYA: What time is the train?

KRISH: Noon.

NADYA (*calling*): Zana—Zana——

ZANA (*entering*): Yes, madame?

NADYA: Pack everything up as quickly as possible, Zana; we're going back to Krayia.

ZANA (*biting her lip to control herself*): To Krayia?

NADYA: Yes. You *will* come with me, won't you, Zana?

ZANA: Yes, madame.

NADYA: If you'd rather stay behind in Paris—I shall understand.

ZANA (*chokily*): I'd rather go with you, madame.

NADYA (*going to her*): Don't cry—we have so much before us. I shall need your help a lot.

ZANA (*pulling herself together*): Yes, madame.

[*She goes out. NADYA goes over to her desk and seats herself at it.*]

NADYA: I must write a note to Sabien saying good-bye. Then I'll dress. We haven't over much time.

KRISH: There is a private saloon reserved for you. Everything is arranged.

NADYA (*half turning in her chair and looking at KRISH*): I wonder if I shall ever see him again.

CURTAIN.

ACT II

TIME: *A year later.*

SCENE: *The Queen's private apartments in the Royal Palace at Rodelle, Krayia.*

It is a very simple room beautifully furnished. At the back, centre, is a door leading into the bedroom. Up right there is a door leading to ZANA'S room and a service staircase. Up left there are double doors leading to an ante-room, and down left a large French window opening on to a balcony.

AT RISE: MISS PHIPPS is standing on the balcony, discernible to the audience. She is holding a pair of mother-of-pearl opera-glasses to her eyes.

MISS PHIPPS: Zana—Zana—come here quickly—the state carriage has passed through the gates.

[ZANA comes in from right and runs out on to the balcony too.]

ZANĀ: It's lovely, isn't it? All those colours!

MISS PHIPPS: How fortunate that the weather held over!

ZANA (*raptly*): Look at her standing on the steps! Doesn't she look wonderful?

MISS PHIPPS: She's laughing. I don't think she ought to laugh.

ZANA: It's the General whispering—he always amuses her.

MISS PHIPPS: If it had been in England, the Queen would have met them at the station.

ZANA: It's much better as it is.

MISS PHIPPS: There—they're getting out—he's very tall and dignified.

ZANA: So is the Duchess, true to type. Zalgans are always like that.

MISS PHIPPS (*excitedly*): She's kissed the Duchess, now he's kissing her hand—hark at the cheering!

ZANA: They sound all right, don't they? No signs of a disturbance.

MISS PHIPPS: Thank God for that! I was terrified last night, all that shouting, and the firing down by the West gate.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

ZANA: It wasn't anything much.

MISS PHIPPS: Now they're going in—— (*She screams.*) Look! What's happening!

[*There is the sound of a shot, then a lot of screaming and yelling.*]

ZANA: They're shooting! They're shooting! (*She stops up her ears and jumps back into the room.*)

MISS PHIPPS: No, no, only one shot—somebody in the crowd, look at the commotion going on.

ZANA: Is she hurt! Is she hurt?

MISS PHIPPS: No, he missed, whoever it was.

ZANA (*venturing out on to the balcony again*): Has she gone in?

MISS PHIPPS: Yes, it's all right, no one's hurt—listen! They've started the Anthem——

[*The Krayian National Anthem is heard. It swells louder and louder as the crowd takes it up.*]

ZANA (*excitedly*): Come on—we'll sing it too—we'll sing it from here.

[*They both sing it; as the music dies away, they stop singing and come into the room.*]

MISS PHIPPS: All the festivities are over now, until to-night. Everyone's going home.

ZANA: It was an anarchist I suppose—brutes!

MISS PHIPPS: So unpleasant—just as the Prince was arriving.

ZANA: He's handsome, isn't he?

MISS PHIPPS: I couldn't see clearly enough to judge.

ZANA: I'm glad he's handsome, like his photographs. She'll probably grow very fond of him.

MISS PHIPPS: We will not discuss the matter, if you please.

ZANA: Why not? She wouldn't mind.

MISS PHIPPS: It would be better if you did not refer to Her Majesty as "she" quite so often, Zana.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

ZANA: You did, just now on the balcony. You said you didn't think she ought to laugh.

MISS PHIPPS: That will do, Zana.

ZANA: I've been with her all my life nearly—all that time in Paris. She knows I call her "she."

MISS PHIPPS (*sternly*): That will *do*, Zana. I have letters to write. _

ZANA: Well, it's no use settling down now, *she'll* be up in a minute!

[ZANA *flounces off*. MISS PHIPPS, *with an exclamation of annoyance, goes over to bureau and begins to sort over some letters. Two pages in royal livery throw open the double doors and NADYA enters followed by GENERAL KRISH. She is wearing an exceedingly beautiful white and silver dress, with an enormous train. She also wears a small diamond and silver coronet. She sinks down wearily in chair, right.*

NADYA: Thank Heaven that's over! It was nerve-racking.

KRISH: We've caught the fellow—I saw him being led away. He'll be tried and shot.

NADYA: Oh, I didn't mean that only, the whole affair was nerve-racking—I'm getting used to sudden shots and screams. (*She calls.*) Zana—Zana——

ZANA (*entering*): You called, Madame?

NADYA: Yes, Zana, take this. (*She takes off her coronet.*) And put out something really cool—I want to rest for a little while.

ZANA: Yes, Madame.

[*She takes the coronet and goes off.* NADYA *pats her hair into place.*

MISS PHIPPS: Is there anything I can do for you, Your Majesty?

NADYA: Yes, Miss Phipps, presently I want you to telephone through to Prince Keri's apartments. (*To KRISH.*) Krish, dear, hand me an apple, they're in the bowl behind you.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

[MISS PHIPPS goes off into ante-room. KRISH hands bowl and NADYA takes an apple.]

NADYA: Won't you have one, too?

KRISH: No, thank you.

NADYA (*biting apple*): I really do feel quite exhausted. I suppose it was standing on those steps in the blazing sun.

KRISH: You were wonderfully calm when the shot was fired.

NADYA (*smiling*): What did you expect me to do, rush shrieking indoors?

KRISH: No, but it's pleasant to see you living up to my ideal of you.

NADYA: Thank you, Krish, you say very sweet things sometimes.

KRISH: The blackguard fired point-blank at you, but a man standing behind him had the presence of mind to jerk his arm up.

NADYA: How nice of him!

KRISH: I suggest that you give him a brief audience some time during the afternoon and thank him personally.

NADYA (*without enthusiasm*): Very well. Perhaps he'll turn out to be an anarchist himself and stab me!

KRISH: Every precaution will be taken.

NADYA: Don't look so solemn, Krish. Send him up at five or half-past.

KRISH: By the by, is Miss Phipps proving satisfactory?

NADYA: Very—it was a splendid idea of yours. There's something so comforting about the English point of view, specially in a crisis.

KRISH: Was she frightened last night?

NADYA: Yes, but she never showed it until it was all over.

KRISH: Excellent!

NADYA: Why?

KRISH: Nothing—I just wondered.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

NADYA: How is everything going? Have you any news, any particular news?

KRISH: No, things are still very serious, whether it develops into a revolution or not, depends upon the next few weeks.

NADYA: Weeks! I should say days.

KRISH: I think the wedding will check it. Keri looked exceedingly attractive, and several women threw flowers into the carriage—such a good sign.

NADYA: If there's a revolution I shall have to escape—fly the country?

KRISH: Yes, but don't worry—I hardly——

NADYA: And it will all have been for nothing! It seems a pity, doesn't it?

KRISH: It won't come to that.

NADYA: I wonder.

KRISH: Would you be glad?

NADYA: No, I should be disgusted with myself. I should have failed.

KRISH: Everything will come right yet.

NADYA: Everything?

KRISH (*firmly*): Yes—everything.

NADYA: You continue to be a comfort too beautifully, Krish. I love watching you.

KRISH (*smiling*): I'm glad.

NADYA: I often wonder what really goes on inside your brain. You always appear placid and undisturbed, even with your beloved country trembling on the verge of revolution.

KRISH: My beloved country has trembled on the verge so many times before that I'm quite hardened to it by now; also, I have an instinctive faith in you.

NADYA: It's very nice of you to say so, but I'm afraid your faith is sadly misplaced. After all, I'm the main cause of the trouble—my flaming past!

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

KRISH: The trouble was just as bad before you came.

NADYA: No, it wasn't—not quite. The fact of my being on the throne has inspired these fanatics with a positive frenzy of rage. They've carefully unearthed every folly I've ever committed and invented several that I haven't, in order to incite the people against me! And they're succeeding. You know they're succeeding.

KRISH: So far and no further. You're not really unpopular with the large majority, in spite of their efforts.

NADYA: Sometimes I feel absolutely hopeless.

KRISH: Well, don't; it never does any good.

NADYA: To have tried so hard, and to be rebuffed on all sides. For things to get steadily worse instead of better—it's heart-breaking.

KRISH: Surely you didn't expect to do much in a year? It's such a short time.

NADYA: A short time! (*She smiles.*) I wonder if every year of my life will seem as long as this one has been?

KRISH: After to-morrow you will have Keri to share your burdens.

NADYA: Yes. I'm glad of that.

KRISH: I think you'll find everything growing perceptibly easier quite soon.

NADYA: I wonder what he feels about it all.

KRISH: Judging by the charming smile with which he greeted you, I should say he was very happy.

NADYA: Yes, it was a nice smile, wasn't it? But I shouldn't say very happy. Very kind, perhaps, but not very happy. (*She leans over and rings bell on bureau.*) I'm going to talk to him now on the telephone. Don't go.

[*Re-enter* MISS PHIPPS.]

Will you get through to Prince Keri now, please, Miss Phipps? Tell him I want to speak to him.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

MISS PHIPPS: Yes, Your Majesty. (*She goes to telephone.*)

NADYA: I felt a little alarmed by the Duchess.

KRISH: You needn't have been. I believe she is very charming.

MISS PHIPPS (*at telephone*): Hallo—please put me through to His Royal Highness Prince Keri immediately.

KRISH: . . . I used to know her years ago. She was lovely as a girl.

NADYA: She still is, I think. I love those sort of looks. Her hat was perfect.

MISS PHIPPS (*at telephone*): Her Majesty desires to speak to His Royal Highness, if you please. (*To NADYA.*) He's coming to the telephone, Your Majesty.

[*She rises and stands aside. NADYA gets up and goes to telephone.*]

NADYA (*at telephone*): Hallo—hallo—is that you? Yes, it's me.—I hope you're comfortable and everythings—splendid.—Listen, we're not supposed to meet again officially until dinner to-night, so I thought you might like to come along and talk to me now for a little. I'm sure there's lots of ice that needs breaking.—What!—Oh, that's awfully sweet of you.—Well, I'm very pleased so far—— (*She laughs.*) No, I don't expect so. Will you ask Her Excellency to come too?—We'll all have tea and relax thoroughly. (*She hangs up receiver.*) He's coming now. Stay and receive him while I go and take off this particularly heavy train.

KRISH: Of course I will.

[*She gives him her hand to kiss, and goes off into the bedroom.*]

MISS PHIPPS *begins to go towards the door.*

Please don't go, Miss Phipps, I want to speak to you.

MISS PHIPPS: Yes, General.

KRISH: Perhaps you'd sit down for a moment? (*He holds out a chair.*)

MISS PHIPPS (*sitting*): Thank you.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

KRISH: What I am going to say is confidential—you understand?

MISS PHIPPS: Quite, General.

KRISH: I suppose you don't by any chance possess a dying sister anywhere, do you?

MISS PHIPPS (*alarmed*): I hope not. Muriel was quite well last week. I heard on Tuesday. What do you mean? Are you trying to break something to me?

KRISH (*hurriedly*): No, no, no—you misunderstand——

MISS PHIPPS: Her constitution's particularly strong. Even when we were all down with mumps I remember Muriel——

KRISH: My dear Miss Phipps, I have no reason for supposing that your sister isn't in excellent health. I only thought we might perhaps use her as an excuse.

MISS PHIPPS: An excuse! For what?

KRISH: In case you wished to leave Her Majesty's service——suddenly!

MISS PHIPPS: Leave!—Why—what? I don't understand. Am I not satisfactory?

KRISH: You're perfectly satisfactory—in fact, it is a great comfort to me to feel that Her Majesty should have someone by her—so reliable—and—er—steady as yourself.

MISS PHIPPS: Thank you, General, I'm sure I——

KRISH: I am taking this opportunity of warning you. Krayia, I regret to say, is—at the moment—in a very grave state.

MISS PHIPPS: Yes, General.

KRISH: Even Her Majesty herself is not aware of the full seriousness of the situation. I'm afraid that nothing now can avert a revolution. If we can manage to tide over to-morrow's ceremony there may be a chance, but a very slender one.

MISS PHIPPS: You mean that it may start—to-night?

KRISH: Yes.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

MISS PHIPPS: How very tiresome—for Her Majesty and you and the Prince and everybody——

KRISH: You are an Englishwoman and therefore entitled to consideration as a guest in this country. A car will be put at your disposal and you could be across the frontier by midnight.

MISS PHIPPS: I'm exceedingly grateful to you, General, but on the whole I think I'd rather stay. I can take care of myself. Also I have a lot of important letters to write for Her Majesty after tea. (*She rises.*)

KRISH (*shaking hands with her*): Thank you, Miss Phipps. I didn't think it would be any use.

[MISS PHIPPS goes out. The General smiles to himself and goes to the telephone.

(*At telephone.*) Hallo—hallo—put me through to Captain Myrtaïs, please.—Yes—General Krish speaking. (*Pause.*) Hallo—is that you, Myrtaïs?—Yes. Have you found the man who saved Her Majesty's life this afternoon?—What?—Staying at the Imperial Hotel.—Well, will you see that he is in the palace at five o'clock. Her Majesty wishes to thank him personally.—Yes, I shall probably be here.—Ring through when he arrives.

[*He hangs up receiver and walks down to the window. The PAGES throw open the double doors.*

PAGES (*announcing*): His Royal Highness Prince Keri of Zalgar.

[PRINCE KERI enters. He is dressed in the uniform of a Colonel of the Zalgar Hussars.

KRISH: Her Majesty told me to receive you; she is putting on something cool.

KERI (*shaking hands*): How sensible!

KRISH (*offering him cigarette-case*): Perhaps you'll smoke?

KERI (*smiling*): No thank you—not yet.

KRISH: Hot, isn't it?

KERI: Extremely.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

KRISH: Do you play bridge?

KERI: Yes, brilliantly.

KRISH: Good.

KERI: Why?

KRISH: I hope when opportunity offers you will teach Her Majesty.

KERI: I shall be charmed.

KRISH: She has no head for cards.

KERI: What a pity!

KRISH: It is very worrying.

KERI: Is she fond of the opera?

KRISH: Passionately.

KERI: Splendid.

KRISH: With the exception of *Faust*.

KERI: Naturally.

KRISH: Do you sing at all?

KERI: Oh yes, sometimes.

KRISH: Tenor or baritone?

KERI: It depends on my mood.

KRISH: I understand.

KERI: I have some very good soprano notes in the earlier part of the day.

KRISH: Excellent.

KERI: No technique, you know, but exquisite "timbre."

KRISH: You should be very happy here; we're an exceedingly musical nation.

KERI: How awful!

[NADYA enters from her room in a soft clinging tea-gown.

NADYA: This really is very charming of you.

KERI (*kissing her hand*): I am enchanted. My aunt will join us presently.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

NADYA: I'm so glad.

KRISH: If she would allow it, I should be charmed to wait upon Her Excellency and escort her here.

KERI: I'm sure she'd be delighted. You're very kind.

KRISH: Your Majesty. (*He kisses her hand.*)

NADYA: Thank you, Krish.

[KRISH bows to the Prince and goes out.]

It's better that we should be able to talk a little together first.

KERI: Quite. That is the reason I came on ahead. I do hope you're not tired after this afternoon's ordeal.

NADYA: Not at all, thank you. It wasn't such a very dreadful ordeal.

KERI: Surely to be fired at by a frenzied anarchist and meet a perfectly strange *fiancée* all in the course of ten minutes must be a little unnerving?

NADYA: Perhaps I shall suffer a hysterical reaction later on. Won't you sit down?

KERI: Not just yet, if you don't mind. This is such an important moment in my life I prefer to face it standing.

NADYA: Is it—so important?

KERI: You sounded so nice on the telephone, now you're a little antagonistic. Will you tell me why?

NADYA: I don't know. I don't mean to be antagonistic. I'm sorry.

KERI: I'm horribly nervous.

NADYA (*smiling*): Are you—are you really?

KERI: Of course.

NADYA: That makes me feel a little better.

KERI: I thought it would.

NADYA: I was perfectly happy talking to you on the telephone, but somehow when I met you face to face I could have shrieked from sheer panic! I heard your voice talking to Krish and it

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suddenly dawned on me that we are to be married to-morrow. That's what unhinged me! Until that moment I'd sort of taken it for granted without really thinking about it.

KERI: It's rather funny, you know.

NADYA: And rather pathetic too.

KERI: I think I'll sit down now. The worst's over.

NADYA (*handing him cigarette-box*): Do, and smoke and be comfortable.

[*There is a long pause.*]

I feel that there's such a lot to say, and yet I don't know where to begin.

KERI: Let's forget for a little while all the diplomatic machinery that's brought us together and make a few plans for our personal happiness.

NADYA (*quizzically*): Happiness?

KERI (*smiling*): Well, as near as we can get.

NADYA: What a strange situation it is! It seems so far away and unreal. I don't feel in the least as though we were actual individuals on the eve of marriage.

KERI: We're not individuals. We're political puppets on strings. It's very labour-saving in the end.

NADYA: Are you pretending you like it?

KERI: Yes.

NADYA: Well, don't pretend. You know it's hateful and so do I.

KERI: I don't think it's going to be quite as hateful as I feared.

NADYA: Thank you.

KERI: You know I came here fully prepared to treat you to a little diplomatic love-making! Nothing sincere, of course, just enough to establish a correct atmosphere between us.

NADYA: Well, why don't you begin?

KERI: I'm afraid you'd laugh.

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NADYA: I expect I should. Don't let's have any pretences about our marriage—anyhow, in private.

KERI: You won't object if I devour you with eyes of passion in public now and again, will you?

NADYA: Not if you feel it's really necessary.

KERI: Well, I think so, to-morrow certainly. It will give a sort of "cachet" to the wedding.

NADYA: I'm afraid it will all be very tiring. I shall take asperin before the ceremony.

KERI: So shall I.

NADYA: Do you take the tablets whole, or crushed in water?

KERI: Whole, they're easier to swallow.

NADYA: So do I. We have a lot in common.

KERI: I am glad. It will make things so much nicer.

NADYA: Are you ambitious? Ambitious for Krayia, I mean?

KERI: Yes, I want to make a success of everything. Don't you?

NADYA: It's the only thing left to me.

KERI: I understand.

NADYA: So far I've been a miserable failure and I really have tried. It's like being on a desert island with raging seas round me all the time—rising! Sometimes I fear that they will engulf me altogether.

KERI: It's a perilous position.

NADYA: You realize that?

KERI: Of course I do. That's why I've come to help, I don't mind fighting a bit. The only thing I've lacked so far is a definite goal.

NADYA: Will Krayia supply that?

KERI: Yes. I want to see it a peaceful and happy country, and I want to see you a peaceful and happy woman. I think from the trouble in your eyes that you deserve to be.

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NADYA: Thank you. That's very dear of you and very kind.

KERI: I hear that there was some rioting last night!

NADYA: Yes, nothing much in itself, but ominous under existing circumstances.

KERI: I'd like to get hold of those damned agitators and shoot them without trial.

NADYA: It would only make things worse in the end. They nearly shot me without trial this afternoon.

KERI: I half expected something of the sort. It was wonderfully dramatic, like a romantic play. All the bright colours and the sunshine and you standing serenely at the top of the steps with diamonds glittering in your hair. I was waiting for you to stretch out your arms and cry "My People! My People!"

NADYA: Oh, no, that will come when the revolution really starts, and the palace is besieged by a howling mob with torches.

KERI: And scythes! I insist on scythes.

NADYA: I shall come out on to the balcony, all in white, with a baby in my arms.

KERI: I'm afraid it will have to be a borrowed baby.

NADYA: Never mind. Every mother in that crowd will fling down her scythe and go home.

KERI: And the revolution will be over.

NADYA: And we shall reign happily ever after! (*She sighs.*) How impossible real life is, isn't it?

KERI: It has its splendid moments.

NADYA: They're desperately short.

KERI (*looking down*): Yes—*desperately* short.

NADYA: I suppose, later on—one won't mind so much.

KERI: It depends—there are nearly always compensations of some sort.

NADYA: Are there?

KERI: Oh, yes, the only difficulty is recognizing them.

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NADYA: You think it's a bad plan to dwell too much on "might have beens"?

KERI: What's the use?

NADYA: No use at all—you're perfectly right—a little cold-blooded perhaps.

KERI (*smiling*): Cold-blooded!

NADYA: Well, shall we say "Detached"?

KERI: I'm glad you think that. I do try so hard.

NADYA: Is it very uphill work?

KERI: Sometimes.

NADYA: There are moments when the whole business seems utterly futile, don't you think?

KERI: Those are dangerous moments.

NADYA: I know.

KERI: Cheer up!

NADYA: I'm not depressed really.

KERI: Good.

NADYA: But I feel rather strange.

KERI: How surprising!

NADYA: You're laughing at me.

KERI: Please forgive me.

NADYA: I like it—I'm rather given to being intense every now and then—you do understand, don't you?

KERI: Perfectly.

NADYA: And unless I'm curbed I become a bore.

KERI: Is this a warning?

NADYA: yes—You see we know so awfully little about one another really, it's only fair to put up a few sign-posts.

KERI: I don't believe they're going to be nearly as necessary as you think.

NADYA: I hope not.

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KERI: Being in the same boat helps.

NADYA: Are we?

KERI: I think so.

NADYA: As a matter of fact, I felt it instinctively when we first met—in that glaring sun.

KERI (*smiling*): You were quite right.

NADYA: And here we are—both of us—with so much responsibility, so much to face, and so much to do. Permanently out of reach of our heart's desire.

KERI: What is your true heart's desire?

NADYA (*quietly*): To return to the man I love, and live a sweet life without hills or valleys. Just the smooth level of peace all the time. I do ache for it so.

KERI: Something else in common—our heart's desire.

NADYA: Is she alive?

KERI: Oh, yes, she's alive, but she's far away and there's no chance of my ever seeing her again—anyhow, until it's too late.

NADYA: Is it ever too late?

KERI: Yes.

NADYA: You mean when we've grown old?

KERI: When we're really middle-aged, it's not happy when one has lived on memories and dreams, to come suddenly face to face again with the inspiration of those dreams, middle-aged, too, grey and tired and perhaps fat

NADYA: I suppose love isn't proof against that?

KERI: Not love, affection perhaps, that lasts always, but not love—our kind of love.

NADYA: How sad it all is!

KERI: Yes, but quite inevitable. It's no use pretending to ourselves that these fires within us can go on burning indefinitely without fuel. They'll die down to ashes in so many years and we shall be content to let them.

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NADYA: Shall we ever forget entirely, I wonder?

KERI: Never, because we're sentimentalists. Rabid sentimentalists.

NADYA: I suppose we are.

KERI: Of course we are. There'll always be wistful moments in our lives when we shall shed tears for what might have been. But after a while they'll only be crocodile tears.

[*The PAGES fling open the double doors.*

PAGES (*announcing*): Her Excellency the Grand Duchess Emilie of Zalgar. General Krish.

[*The DUCHESS enters followed by KRISH.*

DUCHESS (*advancing*): My dear, what a perfectly *delightful* plan of yours! I was afraid I shouldn't get an opportunity of talking to you at all, except in public. I'm staying such a *short* while and we're all going to be so *dreadfully* occupied.

NADYA: It's very charming of you to waive ceremony like this.

DUCHESS: I'm sure I'm only too *glad*. Ceremony is odious at any time, but in this heat it's positively *shattering*!

NADYA: We'll have some iced tea at once, *a l'Americaine*.

DUCHESS: Do you mean in those lovely tall glasses filled with lumps of ice?

NADYA (*ringing bell*): Yes.

DUCHESS: How *too* delicious! I remember that and Coney Island were the only sensations I really enjoyed in the whole United States.

KERI: We were there in terrifically hot weather.

[*ZANA enters wheeling a table on which are four long glasses filled with ice. In addition to the usual paraphernalia of afternoon tea. KERI arranges the DUCHESS comfortably in an arm-chair. KRISH hands her a small cake-stand containing petits fours, etc.*

DUCHESS: I do hope you and Keri have taken a fancy to one another. It will make life so much easier for you.

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NADYA: I believe we have.

DUCHESS: Splendid!

She takes a cake proffered by KRISH.

How delicious, thank you so much—it's wonderful after years of rigid dieting to be able to give in like this without a qualm.

KERI: I never remember you denying yourself very much, Aunt Emilie.

DUCHESS: General Krish—ever since you greeted me on the steps that afternoon, I've been racking my brains to think where we'd met before. Now I remember. The Venetian Carnival at Styre.

KRISH: Yes, the Venetian Carnival. It was many years ago.

DUCHESS: Do you really remember, or are you just being polite to me?

KRISH: I really remember. You wore a plum-coloured domino with a mask of silver lace.

DUCHESS (*taking glass of tea from KERI*): The domino was maroon, but I expect some plums are maroon, too. (*To NADYA.*) It was a lovely night, I was just nineteen and engaged for the first time. There was a brilliant moon, and we glided about in little coloured gondolas. It seems a pity that you and Keri shouldn't be given romantic opportunities like that!

NADYA: It would be a still greater pity to have the opportunities and disregard them.

DUCHESS (*looking from one to the other*): I see. So you've decided to start your lives together on a basis of friendship only?

KERI: Yes—if we can.

NADYA (*glancing at him*): I think we can.

DUCHESS: How sensible of you! Of course, in some ways you miss a lot, but it's *much* less fatiguing in the long run.

NADYA (*laughing*): I'm sure it is,

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KRISH: Looked at from that angle, a political marriage really doesn't seem so bad.

DUCHESS: Well, I've found it the most satisfactory way of all, it's infinitely easier to follow other people's machinations than your own heart.

NADYA (*vehemently*): No! Follow your heart always—if possible!

DUCHESS: That sounds all very fine in theory, but in practice it's often *dismally* unsuccessful. I've done it several times with the most *devastating* results.

KERI: Perhaps, Aunt Emilie, your own particular heart hasn't a very good bump of locality!

DUCHESS: I've always been so dreadfully self-conscious in love. (*To NADYA.*) Haven't you?

NADYA: Yes, perhaps I have.

DUCHESS: I've had three husbands, you know.

NADYA: Were you pleased with them?

DUCHESS: Not pleased exactly—but keenly interested.

KERI: You'd never believe, looking at her now, that Aunt Emilie was once the most romantic figure in the whole history of our country.

DUCHESS: That was many years ago.

NADYA: Before any of the husbands?

DUCHESS: No, during the first one.

NADYA: Did you ever run away?

DUCHESS: Yes, but I soon came back—as we all do.

NADYA: It's strange, isn't it?

DUCHESS: Self-sacrifice in our walk of life has almost ceased to be strange any more.

KERI: Just monotonous.

DUCHESS: Exactly.

NADYA: It's high time someone broke the tradition.

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DUCHESS (*looking at her sharply*): I said that once.

NADYA (*with vehemence*): Why didn't you do it, then?

DUCHESS: For the same reason that will prevent you.

KRISH: May I have a little more tea, please?

NADYA: Of course—I'm so sorry. (*She pours some into his glass.*)

DUCHESS: It's all right, General, I'm never indiscreet when I'm sure of my ground.

NADYA: Thank you.

DUCHESS: I mean it—pleasant surprises loosen the tongue very agreeably.

NADYA: You're being awfully charming to me—I hope I shan't burst into tears.

DUCHESS: We'll leave broken romance and coronets and talk of gayer things.

NADYA: How I envy you!

DUCHESS: That's very sweet of you—do tell me why.

NADYA: To have got through your life so well and be quite amused and happy—I'm sure you've been amused always—even through your tragedies.

DUCHESS: It's nice to think that now anyhow.

NADYA: Will you teach me the secret?

DUCHESS: Just refrain from taking yourself too seriously.

NADYA: I'll try.

KERI: We'll try together.

[*The telephone bell rings.*]

KRISH: That's for me, I expect.

NADYA: Answer it anyhow, Krish dear.

[*KRISH goes to telephone.*]

Will you have some more tea, Duchess?

DUCHESS: No, thank you.

NADYA (*enquiringly*): Keri?

[*KERIS shakes his head, for KRISH has begun to speak.*]

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KRISH (*at telephone*): Hallo—yes, speaking, is that you, Myrtaïs? What? Oh, yes, what's his name? Florent—French, I suppose. (*To NADYA.*) The man who deflected that shot this afternoon is here. You promised him an audience.

NADYA: Tell them to send him up to the ante-room in ten minutes.

KRISH: Send him up to the ante-room in ten minutes. Her Majesty will see him then. Yes. . . . Oh, I see, very well, I'll come. (*He hangs up receiver.*)

DUCHESS: Oh, *don't* say you have to rush away to pressing military duties! There *were* so many questions I wanted to ask you.

KRISH: Do you think you could possibly hold them over until this evening?

DUCHESS: Yes, but there's no need to prepare a series of diplomatically evasive answers. They won't be political questions.

KRISH: How relieving! (*He kisses her hand.*)

NADYA: Come back at seven o'clock, Krish, I want your advice about several things.

KRISH: At your service—always. (*He kisses her hand, bows to KERI, and goes out.*)

NADYA: He's my greatest friend in the world.

DUCHESS: He's perfectly charming, and so delightfully true to type. Courteous, grey-haired and efficient.

NADYA: He's the first cousin of Colonel Sapt in Zenda, you know.

DUCHESS: I might have guessed it. Men like that are *such* a comfort. No European court would be complete without them.

KERI: I remember old Sapt quite well. You see, father and Rupert of Hentzau were at school together.

DUCHESS: Is this man who is waiting for an audience with you one of your own guards or a complete stranger?

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NADYA: A complete stranger—Krish thought it would be politic to thank him personally.

DUCHESS: He's quite right. Just give him a *dazzling* smile, and say you're *eternally* indebted to him, and he'll be loyal for life.

KERI: We need all the loyalty we can get just now.

DUCHESS: So does every other country.

NADYA: It was very unfortunate that it should have happened just during your arrival. I was hoping to get through the day without any disturbance.

DUCHESS: Oh, please don't worry about me. I've been fired at *scores* of times, luckily the poor fools were so blinded by zeal that they didn't aim properly.

KERI: Aunt Emilie has passed unscathed through four revolutions.

DUCHESS: Five, dear, counting the small one when your Uncle Paul took to flying his kite in the public cemetery. He *loved* his kite!

NADYA (*smiling*): The lower classes are so touchy over that sort of thing.

[*The DUCHESS rises.*]

DUCHESS: Keri, I must go and rest now. (*To NADYA.*) It really has been most delightful—when the country's quietened down, you must come and stay for a little.

NADYA: I should love to.

KERI (*bending over her hand*): Until to-night.

NADYA (*gently*): Several loads have been lifted off my heart already—thank you.

DUCHESS: My visit to Krayia was really quite unnecessary, but I'd heard your story and was curious—please forgive me. (*She suddenly kisses her.*) You mustn't be disturbed over your temporary unpopularity. Your personal charm will outlive any past, however scarlet.

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[She goes out, followed by KERI. NADYA stands silent for a moment, half smiling, then she turns.]

NADYA (*calling*): Zana—Zana——

ZANA (*entering*): Yes, Madame?

NADYA (*slipping a small ring from her finger and holding it out to her*): You've won your wager, Zana. Here it is.

ZANA (*hesitating*): Oh, Madame, I——

NADYA: Take it, Zana; don't be silly. You've reassured me over so many things, now one of your little reassurances have come true. He's an absolute dear.

ZANA (*taking the ring and curtseying*): Thank you, Madame. I knew he would be, from his photographs.

NADYA: How things change, don't they?

ZANA: Yes, Madame.

NADYA: I never used to see Krayia in the same light as I see it now.

ZANA: Perhaps it's because it belongs to you.

NADYA: It doesn't really, not until I can make the people like me. Oh, Zana, I do feel so different about it all now, I'm going to have someone to share my responsibilities, someone to whom I can turn for advice, someone to laugh with! He really has quite a delicious sense of humour; we giggled—actually giggled over the revolution!

ZANA (*startled*): The revolution—Oh, Madame.

NADYA: Oh, it doesn't matter! Even if it comes it won't last. He'll fight it—so shall I—and we'll get back! (*She flings out her arms.*) I can see ahead at last! Take away those tea-things quickly. I've got to see that man. He saved my life this afternoon—I'm going to thank him—I shall probably kiss him!

[She rings bell. ZANA hurriedly collects the scattered tea-things and placing them on the wheel-table, trundles it out of the room.]

MISS PHIPPS *enters*.

Is he there, Miss Phipps?

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MISS PHIPPS: Yes, Your Majesty—with and armed escort.

NADYA: I'm sure that's unnecessary—I'll see him alone.

MISS PHIPPS: Yes, Your Majesty.

[She goes out. NADYA arranges her hair before mirror.]

TWO PAGES enter.

PAGES (*announcing*): Monsieur Florent.

[SABIEN enters. He is very pale and obviously trying to control his nerves. NADYA flings up her arm instinctively as though to shield herself.]

SABIEN: Nadya!

NADYA: Sabien! (*She buries her face in her hands.*) Oh, how could you be so cruel!

SABIEN (*trembling*): I—I couldn't help it.

NADYA: Go away from me.

SABIEN: I can't—not yet.

NADYA (*suddenly controlling herself*): You must.

SABIEN: No, Fate was with me in that crowd to-day. I can't go against Fate, can I?

He laughs rather pitifully.

NADYA: Go away.

SABIEN: When things happen like this, it can't be chance entirely.

NADYA (*pulling herself together*): It was unpardonable of you to come here.

SABIEN: I couldn't help myself. When you left Paris a year ago you took everything from me, not only love. I haven't been able to read, or listen to music, or see beauty in anything. It's as though I'd been struck deaf and blind.

NADYA: I don't know what to say to you.

SABIEN: You can restore to me a little flickering shadow of happiness by letting me stay and be near you for a little while. I want to hear you talk again.

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NADYA (*turning away*): Oh!—

SABIEN: Don't turn away—not love talk—just ordinary things.

NADYA (*beginning to laugh*): It's all so silly.

SABIEN: Don't laugh like that.

NADYA: Why not? There's nothing left to cry over.

SABIEN: It isn't much I'm asking.

NADYA (*still laughing*): No—not much.

SABIEN: Stop laughing.

NADYA: I can't.

SABIEN: May I kiss you?

NADYA: No.

SABIEN: Please!

NADYA: No, no, go away.

SABIEN: Are you afraid?

NADYA: No, I'm not afraid.

SABIEN: Tell me about your life here.

NADYA: Sabien! (*She laughs louder.*)

SABIEN: For Christ's sake, stop laughing!

NADYA: You must forgive me—it's utter hysteria—that's all.

SABIEN: Do you love me still?

NADYA: I loved the memory of you—until now——

SABIEN: Nadya! (*He tries to take her hand.*)

NADYA: Don't.

SABIEN: I don't understand—I'm bewildered. It's seeing you again suddenly—quite close.

NADYA: I'm not quite close any more—you've set me free—that's why I'm laughing.

SABIEN: Tell me what you mean—please—my brain feels horribly muddled.

NADYA: I should be grateful to you, really.

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SABIEN: You must be very angry with me indeed to talk like that. I didn't really mean to force my way in on you. It was just as I said—Fate arranged it all. I wonder why?

NADYA: Don't you know?

SABIEN: No.

NADYA: It's the point of the joke.

SABIEN: How beautiful you look!

NADYA: We don't love one another nearly as much as we thought we did.

SABIEN: Don't we?

NADYA: No. The only difference is that I'm quicker at seeing it than you.

SABIEN (*bitterly*): Do go on. I'm so desperately eager to be convinced.

NADYA: Would you like a cigarette or anything?

SABIEN: No, thank you.

NADYA: Why didn't you come before?

SABIEN: Nadya!

NADYA: I'll tell you—you loved me too well.

SABIEN: Yes—all right—that's awfully logical.

NADYA: Are you beginning to see?

SABIEN (*almost lightly*): Oh, yes, perfectly.

NADYA (*weakly*): Well, then——

SABIEN: I want to kiss you.

NADYA: What's the use?—that's not the part of our love that mattered ever.

SABIEN: All right.

NADYA: Don't look so awfully unhappy, Sabien—a dead illusion is far less painful than a living one.

SABIEN: By coming here to-day—I've killed your love for me. Is that what you are trying to pretend?

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NADYA: Not altogether. It must have died before, really. You see, I've had a certain amount of advantage over you by being so occupied with the country, and being Queen and everything——

SABIEN: Oh, yes. I quite understand.

NADYA: And all that gives me more room in which to see things clearly—I'm probably hurting you and I hate doing it—but you'll see that I'm right soon—honestly, you will.

SABIEN: How wonderful you are!

NADYA: Please—do you mind leaving me now?

SABIEN: Do you think I can't see through your poor darling lies? (*He suddenly catches her in his arms and kisses her.*) You love me. You love me still!—— Nadya—— (*He kisses her again, she pushes him away, her eyes are blazing.*)

NADYA: How dare you!—You're infamous!—— How dare you——!

She stands before him, beating her forehead with her clenched fist.)

SABIEN: I love you—I love you!

NADYA: Oh, God! What am I to do!

[She falls straight forward into his arms. SABIEN stands motionless holding her. He closes his eyes for a moment and opens them again. When he speaks it is half in a whisper.]

SABIEN: It's a dream—that's all it is—it's a dream.

[He carries her across and lays her on a couch—after a moment she opens her eyes and looks at him.]

NADYA: You *have* changed, Sabien—you're much thinner.

SABIEN: Oh, why did you ever go away from me?

NADYA: Don't be silly.

SABIEN: Are you glad I came to-day?

NADYA: Glad! Why should I be glad? All this long time I've been fighting against you—crushing down the memory of you so that I might live my life here more or less properly, without

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that stupid look of misery in my eyes for everyone to see. I've managed to build up a little real enthusiasm and purpose and ambition for my country! And now you come and smash it all up to nothing again. Now, when I need all the control and courage I can muster—Oh, Sabien, how could you——

SABIEN: Hasn't *my* individual Hell ever entered your thoughts?

NADYA: Yes, it has—but——

SABIEN (*bitterly*): But it doesn't matter! Is that it?

NADYA: It *mustn't* matter.

SABIEN: Damn your country! Damn it and curse it! I hate it—I——

NADYA: Don't go on like that—it's cheap.

SABIEN: Oh, forgive me—please—I didn't mean to make it all the more difficult for you, I swear I didn't. I've kept away until I could keep away no longer. I've been here three weeks. I didn't mean you ever to know until this afternoon. When a message came saying you wanted to see me, I went mad. I giggled and shouted and cried—all by myself in my room. I thought that you'd found out somehow and wanted me—really wanted me! It wasn't till afterwards I realized that it was only the Queen wishing to bestow her tactful thanks upon a loyal subject. Then it was too late—I'd been through it all. Meeting you, perhaps first before a lot of people, and kissing your dear hand correctly and not letting anyone see—then at last being alone with you and hearing your voice again. Oh! you do understand, don't you? I couldn't go back then—I couldn't——

NADYA: No. You couldn't—possibly.

SABIEN: Nadya, do you really still love me—as you did?

NADYA: Yes.

SABIEN: Is there no escape for you—ever?

NADYA: None.

SABIEN: What if there's a revolution and you're dethroned?

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NADYA: I shall be exiled—with my husband. And we'll wait, holding ourselves in readiness for better days.

SABIEN (*bitterly*): Better days!

NADYA: Yes.

SABIEN: I'm going to kill myself.

NADYA: Oh, don't do that. You may forget—in time.

SABIEN: Even so, I couldn't endure waiting for that time to come.

NADYA: I shall have to endure it.

SABIEN: You *have* something. I've nothing.

NADYA (*her eyes filling with tears*): No—I suppose you haven't.

SABIEN: Not even the memory of possessing you.

NADYA: No, Sabien. Not even that.

SABIEN: I am denied you as my wife. My whole life is to be lived without you, after all my dreams and plans and hopes. Let me be your lover?

NADYA (*turning away*): No.

SABIEN: Let me be your lover—once—once only——

NADYA: Never. I'm the Queen.

SABIEN: That's heroics! You don't mean it in your heart.

NADYA: I do mean it. Listen! If I gave myself to you even once only, the spell would be broken. It's not heroics, because I *know*. The people here hate me for what I've done in the past. I'm trying to beat down their hatred and suspicion day by day, and prove to them that the past was another life, another existence, before I was born to the responsibility of reigning over them, and therefore to be forgotten, washed away—utterly.

SABIEN (*catching her hand passionately*): Nadya, I implore you!

NADYA (*dragging back*): Don't—don't implore me—help me. Try to understand—for God's sake try to understand.

SABIEN (*straining towards her*): Nadya—Nadya—no one need ever know. Let me come to you to-night!

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NADYA: No—no—no!

SABIEN: You'd never sec me again afterwards.

NADYA: I should know you were alive somewhere, longing for me! I should know no peace—ever.

SABIEN: I shall die to-morrow—anyhow. It's your wedding-day.

NADYA (*burying her face in her hands*): Oh, don't—don't——

SABIEN (*with sudden calmness*): It's true, Nadya darling, and it's much the best way—don't you see? Death is such a little thing compared to the unhappiness we've both of us endured. I don't mind it or fear it a bit, and I know you wouldn't either if you were me.

NADYA (*softly*): No.

SABIEN: I shall die to-morrow whatever happens—do you hear me? *Whatever* happens!

NADYA (*looking straight before her*): Yes.

[*He takes her in his arms and kisses her.*]

SABIEN (*whispering*): Say "Yes" again.

NADYA (*with her eyes closed*): Yes!

CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE I

The scene is the same as Act II; the time is about 11.30 p.m. When the curtain rises the stage is fully lighted. One of the double doors is a little open. Music can be heard playing downstairs.

ZANA enters, right, by service door. She comes across and shuts double doors firmly, then she returns to the service door and beckons.

SABIEN enters. He is in full evening dress and a long black cloak.

ZANA: You must be very quiet.

SABIEN: Like a mouse, Zana.

ZANA: Wait in my room—here—— (*She goes towards her door.*)

SABIEN: May I have a cigarette?

ZANA: Yes, sir. (*She gives him one.*)

SABIEN: It's all very strange, isn't it?

ZANA: Yes, sir.

SABIEN: I feel a sense of unreality, as though we were all in a dream.

ZANA: Perhaps we are, sir.

SABIEN: It's a strain—trying all the time not to wake up.

ZANA: Yes, sir.

SABIEN: Will she be very long?

ZANA: Oh no, sir, I don't think so; it's not a ball, only a State dinner.

SABIEN: Nadya at a State dinner. (*He laughs.*) It's difficult to imagine.

ZANA: I believe Her Majesty finds them very tiring.

SABIEN: Her Majesty! I beg your pardon, Zana, I'd forgotten. That's part of the dream.

ZANA: Oh no, sir, it's part of the waking up.

SABIEN: You're not nearly so friendly as you used to be, Zana.

ZANA: I'm sorry, sir.

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SABIEN: Like a stranger.

ZANA: I don't mean to be, but——

SABIEN: But what?

ZANA: I'm frightened.

SABIEN: Of me?

ZANA: In a way, sir.

SABIEN: I suppose you think I ought never to have come.

ZANA: Yes, sir.

SABIEN: I couldn't help myself, Zana.

ZANA: No, sir.

SABIEN: Is Prince Keri in love with her?

ZANA: I don't know I'm sure, sir.

SABIEN: I suppose I ought not to have asked you.

ZANA: Everything's very different here, sir, from Paris.

SABIEN: Yes, I see that. Do you miss Paris?

ZANA: In some ways; but this is my country, I was born here.

SABIEN: I understand.

ZANA: I think Her Majesty feels like that about it, too, sir—
now.

SABIEN: She was never happy here.

ZANA: That doesn't make any difference—there's always the future.

SABIEN: Not for everyone, Zana. May I take the cigarette-box in with me?

ZANA: Of course, sir. (*She hands him cigarette-box.*)

SABIEN: I'm frightfully grateful to you, Zana.

ZANA (*putting her finger to her lips*): S-shh!

SABIEN (*whispering*): I'm frightfully grateful to you, Zana!

ZANA: Go in quickly, someone's coming.

[SABIEN retreats into ZANA's room and she closes the door after him. There is the sound of hurried footsteps in the ante-

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room. MISS PHIPPS *enters*. *She wears a hat and coat and thick veil which she has thrown back. Her face is very agitated. She carefully shuts the doors behind her. Her whole attitude suggests portentous secrecy.*

MISS PHIPPS (*breathlessly*): Zana!

ZANA (*alarmed*): What's the matter? What's happened?

MISS PHIPPS (*in sinister tones*): Nothing's happened—yet. (*She removes her hat.*)

ZANA: Where have you been?

MISS PHIPPS: I've been in the town. (*She looks round cautiously as though afraid of prying ears and eyes.*) I dined at "The Blue Rose."

ZANA (*astonished*): "The Blue Rose"!

MISS PHIPPS: All by myself.

ZANA: Miss Phipps, how *could* you?

MISS PHIPPS: I took a table just behind the door. I had this with me in case I was attacked. (*She produces a small revolver from her coat pocket.*)

ZANA: I hope you unloaded it before you went out?

MISS PHIPPS: Of course I did, but it gave me a feeling of security. Fortunately, no one noticed me except—except—one old man!

ZANA (*laughing*): Oh, Miss Phipps—fancy *you*!

MISS PHIPPS (*severely*): Don't be absurd, Zana. I went there prepared to take risks.

ZANA: What did he do?

MISS PHIPPS: He handed me an olive and called me "dear."

ZANA: Yes, and then?

MISS PHIPPS (*intensely*): I realized that the only thing to do was to play up, so I leant forward, flung back my veil, and said, "You look a good sort, let's have some champagne."

ZANA (*trying to control her laughter*): What did he do then?

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

MISS PHIPPS (*triumphantly*): Nothing. He walked straight out of the place.

ZANA: But, Miss Phipps, why did you go there at all?

MISS PHIPPS: I had a purpose, Zana.

ZANA: What sort of purpose?

MISS PHIPPS: To find out what was going on among the people; to discover whether or not there was going to be this dreaded revolution!

ZANA: And is there?

MISS PHIPPS: I don't know.

ZANA: Did you find out anything?

MISS PHIPPS: No, nothing. But mark my words, it's all very sinister.

ZANA: But "The Blue Rose" isn't in the least revolutionary, only thoroughly immoral!

MISS PHIPPS (*putting on her hat again*): That will do, Zana.

ZANA (*pertly*): Let me know when you have any more news!

MISS PHIPPS: I am going up to my room now. I shall not undress. If anything happens in the night, can I rely upon you to call me?

ZANA: It depends *what* happens.

MISS PHIPPS (*crossly*): Oh!

[*She goes out. ZANA, still smiling, goes down left and closes the windows. There is the sound of voices in the ante-room, then NADYA enters, followed by PRINCE KERI. She is in white, and wearing, in addition to a small tiara, several orders.*]

NADYA: Thank you so much for escorting me. Won't you come in and talk for a little?

KERI: No, no. I'm sure you're too tired. Also, think of tomorrow. (*He shudders and laughs.*)

NADYA: Must I?

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KERI: Apropos of that, here's the programme of the day's events. I promised General Krish I'd give it to you. (*He hands her a paper.*)

NADYA: Thank you. (*She places it on the bureau.*) But I absolutely refuse to look at it. I prefer to be pushed through everything like a doll. It's less fatiguing.

KERI: So do I.

NADYA: Oh no, you're ever so much more assertive. You manage things beautifully. Really, your speech to-night was one of the most charming exhibitions of tact I've ever heard. I only wish every soul in the country had been listening, instead of just a handful of well-fed loyalists.

KERI: Didn't you think my expression was awfully good, too? Sort of half shy and rather boyish. I always assume that when there are a lot of old statesmen about, they love it!

NADYA: Humbug!

KERI: Of course. It's part of my equipment, as it is of yours. I watched you chatting away vivaciously, and your bread crumbling—crumbling—all over the tablecloth.

NADYA: I feel rather—rather nervy.

KERI: I'm not altogether surprised.

NADYA: Would you like a liqueur or some coffee or anything?

KERI: No, thank you.

NADYA: Cigarette?

KERI: Yes, please.

NADYA (*looking for the box*): They seem to have disappeared entirely.

KERI: Never mind.

NADYA (*ringing bell*): Zana will know.

[*Enter ZANA.*]

Where are the cigarettes, Zana?

ZANA (*blankly*): In my room, Your Majesty.

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NADYA (*surprised*): In your room?

ZANA: Yes, Your Majesty I—I thought it was dangerous to leave that beautiful box lying about.

NADYA (*realizing*): Oh yes, I see. That was very thoughtful of you. Fetch them now, will you?

ZANA: Yes, Your Majesty. (*She curtseys and goes out.*)

KERI (*smiling*): Your maid seems to have an unduly suspicious mind.

NADYA: The whole atmosphere of the palace is so charged with apprehension at the moment, one can't altogether blame her.

[*Re-enter ZANA with cigarette-box.*]

Thank you, Zana.

[*ZANA curtseys and goes out. NADYA offers KERI a cigarette and takes one herself.*]

KERI: Thank you. (*He lights them both.*)

NADYA: Won't you sit down?

KERI: I'm going in a moment.

NADYA: What a dear the Duchess is!

KERI: Marvellous woman!

NADYA: She has such charm and kindness.

KERI: We're making conversation.

NADYA: I know we are.

KERI: Why?

NADYA: Uneasiness, I suppose.

KERI: If you're uneasy with me, I shall feel I'm failing you at the outset.

NADYA: Don't say that. You've given me the first real feeling of security I've had for ages.

KERI: It's sweet of you to say so.

NADYA: I wonder if your perception is just a brilliantly superficial "part of your equipment" or whether it goes deeper down?

KERI: Oh, *fearfully* deep!

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NADYA (*seriously*): Deep enough to penetrate through wha! appears to be the beastliest portrayal of faith—and perhaps pardon it!

[KERI *glances at her sharply and then smiles.*

KERI: I don't know in the least what you mean, but with your permission I shall always be your friend. What is it they say? "Come weal, come woe."

NADYA: Come weal, come woe.

KERI: Good night. (*He kisses her hand.*)

NADYA: Good night.

[KERI *goes out.* NADYA *waits until his footsteps have died away, then she locks the door after him and calls softly:*

Zana, Zana.

[ZANA *re-enters from service door.*

Is he here, Zana?

ZANA: Yes, Madame. In my room.

NADYA: Quick then—the table.

ZANA: Yes, Madame.

[*She goes out and returns immediately wheeling the trolley-table, which is crowded with supper-things. NADYA opens a little card table, left, and they lay it together, talking in whispers.*

NADYA: Is Miss Phipps in bed?

ZANA: Yes, Madame. She came in a moment ago.

NADYA: Was he waiting there by the little door when you went down?

ZANA: Yes, Madame, he'd been there for half an hour.

NADYA: Don't you think that—that he looks ill, Zana?

ZANA: Not exactly ill, Madame; kind of different.

NADYA (*pausing with a pot of caviar in her hand*): Different! I suppose I look different too. (*She puts it down.*) I'm glad I remembered this.

[ZANA *produces a vase of orchids.*

ZANA: I brought you these, Madame, they looked so lovely.

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NADYA: Oh, Zana, thank you. You don't forget things either.

ZANA: It seems like old times to-night, somehow.

NADYA: Yes, it does.

ZANA: I'll put the champagne on the ice here—by his chair.

NADYA: That's right.

ZANA: It's all ready now, I think.

NADYA: Yes, I think so too.

[They both survey the table critically, then ZANA wheels the trolley-table out of the service door and returns at once.]

ZANA: There's nothing more, Madame?

NADYA: Nothing more. You have the key of the little door?

ZANA: Yes, Madame. Here. *(She taps her pocket.)* Quite safe.

NADYA: Good night, Zana dear.

ZANA: Good night, Madame.

[She curtseys and goes out. NADYA stands silent for a moment, then she moves over and looks in the mirror, right. Then she raps gently on ZANA's door.]

NADYA *(softly)*: Sabien—please come out.

[SABIEN enters. First he bends over her hands, then he takes her in his arms and they stand together for a moment, clinging to one another.]

Let me go, dear. I want to look at you. You're so smart and sleek, just like you used to be.

SABIEN: Do you recognize these? *(He points to the studs in his shirt front.)*

NADYA: Of course. And here—do you remember these? *(She points to her ear-rings.)*

SABIEN: What's happened to the ruby ones?

NADYA: I have them still, but I don't often wear them. They're very heavy.

SABIEN *(admiringly)*: What a wonderful dress!

NADYA: It is nice, isn't it?

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SABIEN (*smiling rather wistfully*): So stately and appropriate Do you remember that flame-coloured one?

NADYA: Yes; but, you know, I never wore it much after that dreadful night at the Cabaret d' Alicante.

SABIEN (*laughing*): Wasn't it appalling? Poor Suzanne!

NADYA: Where is Suzanne now?

SABIEN: I haven't seen her for months. She married Maurice in the end.

NADYA: I always said she would.

SABIEN: They fight like devils.

NADYA: They never did anything else. Sit down and let's have supper now. It's only cold food, of course, but it's been chosen with the most scrupulous care. (*She sits down.*) I ate scarcely anything at dinner on purpose to keep hungry for this.

SABIEN (*sitting down*): Caviar—marvellous!

NADYA: Open the champagne, there's a darling—it's just by you

SABIEN: All right. (*He opens bottle and pours it out.*)

NADYA: Now tell me all about yourself, and what you've been doing. Not sad things.

SABIEN: I can't think of anything not sad since you went away.

NADYA (*after a little pause*): Either can I. Isn't it silly of us to mind so much? Give me some toast.

SABIEN: Here. (*He hands her toast.*) It isn't really. It proves that all the things we said to one another were true.

NADYA: A bitter way of proving them.

SABIEN: Yes, but I think I'd even rather it was like it is than a cheap shallow little affair. A few fireworks, violent reconciliations, and then finish!

NADYA: Like Lucy Griffin and Sirio Marson.

SABIEN: And Julian and Maud.

NADYA: Dear old fat Maud—she *was* fun, wasn't she?

SABIEN: Particularly when a little gay on Chianti. She *loved* Chianti.

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NADYA: What ages and ages ago it seems!

SABIEN: Give me your hand; the left one will do. I'll leave you the right to eat with. (*He takes her hand.*) It feels now as though we'd never been parted.

NADYA: It does, doesn't it? Let's pretend that this is the first night of our marriage and that everything's ordinary and safe.

SABIEN: We'll try, but it's awfully difficult. The truth is so big and domineering, it keeps forcing its way in on us all the time.

NADYA: There is no truth except that we're together again, loving one another so—so desperately.

[*She almost breaks down, but controls herself. There is a slight pause. SABIEN holds up his glass to her.*]

SABIEN: Nadya!

NADYA: No, don't drink to me—it's—it's unlucky.

SABIEN (*lightly*): Yes, perhaps it is

NADYA (*gaily*): Let's go on reminiscing about Paris. Where's Julie now?

SABIEN: Same old studio. She and Madeleine are together again, sharing, having made up their row.

NADYA: *What* a row, too! I shall never forget it. (NADYA *laughs.*)

SABIEN: Nor shall I. (*He laughs too, hectically.*)

NADYA: And when the old Scotsman came up from downstairs and said, "Taisez vous—taisez vous."

SABIEN: In that *appalling* dressing-gown and worse accent——

[*They both go on laughing, looking at one another. Then the laughter dies away.*]

NADYA (*gently*): I'm afraid it's no use—this pretended laughter. It sounds so hollow and unconvincing. Don't let's try any more.

SABIEN: No, we won't.

[*There's another pause.*]

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NADYA: What did you do when you got my note—saying good-bye?

SABIEN: At first I thought it was a joke, and I went on believing that—or trying to—for as long as I could. Though in my heart I knew. Then I went to your flat, but the concierge wouldn't let me in, so I climbed up from Suzanne's—that little balcony at the back—and I stayed there all day among the litter of things you'd left behind. After that everything sort of—— Oh, I don't know. (*He bows his head.*)

NADYA: It was an extraordinary feeling—that journey away from you, leaving suddenly, with all the plans for the future—which a few hours ago had seemed so secure—shattered behind me—nothing left at all. As the train moved out of the station I willed myself to you. I made believe I was kissing you—I willed and willed and willed—clenching my hands and closing my eyes until the tears forced them open again. (*She passes the back of her hand across her eyes.*) People have written lovely things about tears being beautiful and like pearls, but they're wrong. Real tears are ugly and hopeless.

SABIEN: Yes, ugly and hopeless. (*He looks up.*) Oh, Nadya, I do wish Fate hadn't played marionettes with us. It's such utter, utter agony—and so unkind!

[*They sit quite still staring at one another.*]

CURTAIN.

SCENE 2

When the curtain rises the stage is in darkness. The telephone suddenly rings. It continues for a moment or two and then stops. A clock strikes four. After the notes have died away there is the sound of a key being turned in the lock of the double doors leading to the ante-room. GENERAL KRISH and PRINCE KERI enter. KRISH switches on the lights. They speak in whispers.

KRISH: What's the time now?

KERI: Four o'clock. I heard the chimes as we came along the corridor.

KRISH: It will be dawn soon—thank God!

KERI: Daylight is wonderfully comforting, isn't it?

KRISH (*going to the window and peeping through the curtains*): The Square is absolutely silent—not a soul anywhere.

KERI: Good!

KRISH: A little too silent, if anything.

KERI: You mustn't be over-imaginative. It's so bad for the nerves.

KRISH: My nerves are all right.

KERI: Mine aren't; suspense always makes me jumpy.

KRISH: We shall know within an hour—one way or another.

KERI: I'm not going to enjoy that hour very much.

KRISH: What the devil is Myrtaï doing?

KERI: Exactly what we are, I expect—palpitating.

KRISH (*crossly*): All this damned waiting about!

KERI: You told him to telephone through here—at the first sign?

KRISH: Yes.

KERI: Wouldn't it be wiser to wake Her Majesty now? It would give her more time to prepare herself.

KRISH: No, it's quite possible that nothing will happen at all. I don't want to worry her unnecessarily.

KERI: Perhaps you're right. S-ssh—what's that?

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

KRISH: What!

KERI (*going to the window*): I thought I heard a noise in the Square.

KRISH: Don't pull the curtains aside.

KERI: All right (*He peeps through.*)

KRISH: Well?

KERI: Still deserted.

KRISH: Damn!

KERI: I can't see very well.

[The service door opens and ZANA enters. She gives a frightened cry on seeing them.]

KRISH (*catching her arm*): S-ssh—be quiet!

ZANA: What's happening? What's the matter?

KRISH: Nothing yet. We don't intend to disturb Her Majesty unless it's absolutely necessary.

ZANA (*with a scared look towards the bedroom door*): I understand.

KRISH: We're waiting for a telephone message from Captain Myrtais. He has orders to ring through here at the first sign of trouble.

ZANA: Have the people risen?

KRISH: No, not yet.

ZANA (*with another glance towards the door*): Oh, my God! What am I to do?

KRISH (*sharply*): What do you mean?

ZANA: Nothing—nothing. I'm frightened.

KERI: You mustn't be frightened, we'll see that you escape all right.

ZANA: It isn't that—it's—it's—— (*She bursts into tears.*)

KERI (*patting her shoulder*): Come now, you really must control yourself.

ZANA: I'm sorry, Your Highness, I—I'll try.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

KRISH: That's right. Here, drink some of this. (*He pours her out some water and gives it to her.*)

ZANA: Thank you, sir. (*She sips it.*)

KRISH: Now go back to your room like a good girl.

ZANA (*wildly*): No, no—let me stay here—you must let me stay here.

KERI: We'll let you know the moment anything happens—if anything does, which is extremely unlikely.

ZANA: Let me stay, please—please let me stay.

KRISH: Go to your own room, Zana.

ZANA: No, no, no.

KRISH: S-ssh! What in Heaven's name is the matter with you?

ZANA (*clutching his sleeves*): Please—please let me stay here. I won't make a sound.

KERI: You'd better let her, General, she'll have hysterics if you don't.

KRISH: Here you are then. (*He pushes her into a chair.*) Keep quiet and don't say a word.

KERI: I shall sit down too, I'm sick of going about like an animal in a cage. (*He sits down.*)

KRISH: Have you got a cigarette on you?

KERI: No. Here are some. (*He hands him the box.*)

KRISH: There are only three left. (*He takes one.*)

KERI (*also taking one*): Her Majesty smokes far too much; it was half full this evening.

KRISH (*lighting them*): Here.

KERI: Thanks.

[*The three of them sit in silence for a moment.*]

KRISH (*irritably*): Damnation!

KERI: I beg your pardon.

KRISH: I said damnation.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

KERI: Quite.

[There is another silence.]

Even this is preferable to the usual pre-marriage bachelor dinner.

KRISH: What?

KERI: I can't say it all over again; it wasn't very amusing.

KRISH: Good.

[Another silence.]

KERI: These cigarettes are delicious.

KRISH (*gruffly*): Excellent.

KERI: Not too mild.

KRISH: No.

KERI: Not too strong either.

KRISH: No.

KERI: I don't like strong cigarettes.

KRISH: No.

KERI: So bad for my voice.

[Another silence. Very gradually the lights begin to dim.]

ZANA: The lights—what's happening to the lights?

KRISH: S-ssh! Keep quiet.

[The lights slowly go down, then with a final flicker go out altogether.]

KERI: That's bad.

KRISH: It's definite, anyhow. They've got the power station.

KERI: What's happened to Myrtais?

KRISH: God knows.

KERI: You'd better ring through to him.

[At this moment the telephone rings. ZANA gives a cry.]

KRISH: At last! (*He snatches up the telephone.*) Hello, hello—yes—speaking.—What?—I can't hear. . . . I can't hear. . . . Speak louder, man. . . . Hello . . . hello. . . . Damn!

KERI: What's happened?

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

KRISH: It's gone dead. They must have cut the wire.

KERI: Surely it's a house telephone—no one could get at it.

KRISH (*he goes over and pulls the curtains back. The room becomes filled with a rather cold grey light of very early morning*): Good God!

KERI: What is it?

KRISH: Look!

KERI: What does it mean? How did they get there so quickly?

KRISH: They're waiting for a signal. Wake the Queen at once.

ZANA: No, no.

KRISH: Wake Her Majesty immediately—there's not a moment to be lost.

ZANA: I—I—I—I can't, sir. I——

KRISH: What do you mean? Why can't you?

ZANA: I—I——

KRISH (*dragging her to the window*): Here, look!

ZANA: What am I to do? What am I to do?

KRISH: What I tell you.

KERI: I'll wake her. (*He goes toward the door.*)

ZANA (*pulling him out of the way*): No, no, I will. Let me. (*She bangs on the door with her fists. She is half sobbing with fear.*)

KRISH (*catching her by the shoulder*): Go in and wake her. What do you mean by banging the door like that?

ZANA (*desperately*): No, no!

KRISH: The girl's mad. (*He tries to pull her aside.*) Here, let me come—let me come at once.

ZANA (*with her back against the door*): No, you can't.—Go away.—Go into the ante-room. I'll tell her. I'll see that she escapes. It'll frighten her to see you both here. Go into the ante-room, please. Please go into the ante-room.

KRISH (*angrily*): Come away from that door and don't be a fool!

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

[He drags her away. She screams. He is about to enter when KERI touches his arm.]

KERI: Wait! Wait!

[There is silence for a moment, broken only by ZANA's sobs and the steady murmur of the approaching mob. Suddenly the bedroom door opens and NADYA appears. She comes slowly into the room. She has thrown a light wrap over her nightgown.]

NADYA: What is it? What do you want?

KRISH: We want you to dress as quickly as possible and leave the palace with your maid. Captain Vignard will meet you downstairs and escort you through the gardens. There is a car waiting just inside the gates by the boat-house.

NADYA: I don't understand. I suppose I'm sleepy still. I don't understand.

KERI: The people have risen—all the scum of the town——

KRISH: Nadya, for God's sake, pull yourself together!

KERI: You must escape. Put on some clothes quickly.

NADYA: I don't want to escape.

KERI (*sharply*): That's foolish. Do what we tell you!

[NADYA looks at him queerly for a moment and then turns to ZANA.]

NADYA: Stop crying, Zana!

KRISH: If you stay here it may mean your death.

NADYA: After all the trouble you took in wresting me away from my own life. What a pity!

ZANA (*catching her hand*): Listen to them, Madame—they're right. Listen to them!

NADYA (*gently*): Go to your room at once, Zana, and dress yourself.

ZANA (*trying to control her hysteria*): Yes, Madame. (*She goes out.*)

KRISH: What are you waiting for? Every moment is precious.

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

NADYA: I've already told you. I'm not going to escape. I'm not afraid.

KERI: It isn't a question of being afraid. Your life is of value—you're the Queen.

NADYA: Of value. (*She laughs.*) Thank you.

KERI: What do you mean? Why in Heaven's name are you behaving like this?

NADYA (*ignoring him*): Krish, will you go and tell Miss Phipps to prepare to go at once? Her room is the last along that passage. (*She points to service door.*)

KRISH: Nadya——?

NADYA: Please go.

[KRISH looks undecidedly at KERI, who nods. NADYA sees him.

I'm grateful to you for humouring me. Krish?

[KRISH goes out. NADYA walks over to the window.

KERI: Please don't go too near that window.

NADYA (*stops and turns*): Don't be so agitated for me—it doesn't matter.

KERI: This afternoon you were clear-sighted and sensible and quite splendid over everything. What's changed you now?

NADYA: Just the end of everything.

KERI: This is neither heroism or courage, it's sheer selfishness. Just because you're unhappy and don't care what happens you're being quite consciously brave, and it's despicable.

NADYA: You come here asking me to escape. Let me tell you something. I am the cause of this—the sole cause. I've done no good *anywhere*. Don't you see that? Failure after failure all through my life, ending in this supreme one. You don't suppose I'm going to run away now?

KERI: You dedicated your life to Krayia a year ago when you were crowned Queen, and it is breaking faith to allow you

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private sorrows to interfere in a moment like this. If you escape now it won't be from the Krayian people—the *real* people. It will only be from a horde of senseless rabble scraped up from the gutter. In a few weeks it will probably all be over and you will be needed—*badly*! Listen to me—don't turn away—listen——

NADYA: Keri, forgive me, but I can't escape.

[*Re-enter KRISH hurriedly, followed by MISS PHIPPS. She is dressed and quite calm, and carrying a small attache case. She goes straight over and unlocks the bureau, from which she takes several bundles of papers, letters, etc., and stuffs them in the case.*]

KRISH (*gently to NADYA*): Please, we shouldn't advise flight unless it was absolutely necessary.

NADYA: It's urgent—I quite see. Miss Phipps, please go at once. (*She calls.*) Zana—Zana——

MISS PHIPPS (*with conscious calmness*): I have all the important letters; don't worry, they're quite safe.

[*ZANA enters, more or less dressed.*]

NADYA: Zana, go with Miss Phipps. Captain Vignard waiting downstairs.

ZANA: But, Madame, aren't you coming?

NADYA: No.

ZANA: I won't then—not without you!

KERI (*irritable*): Oh, God! all this deathless heroism!

KRISH: Do what you're told, Zana.

NADYA: Zana, I may come afterwards. Go at once.

ZANA (*retreating into a corner*): I won't go—I mean it—I won't!

KRISH: You see, Nadya, you're imperilling other lives as well as your own by this obstinacy.

NADYA: Thank you, Zana. I'd like you to stay. Miss Phipps, please go.

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MISS PHIPPS: Yes, Your Majesty. Good-bye! (*She curtsies and goes out.*)

KERI (*lighting a cigarette*): I'm afraid we're at an *impasse*.

KRISH: It's getting lighter.

KERI: You're utterly miserable—you're hating this!

NADYA (*defiantly*): I don't care—any more.

KERI: That's just pretending. You *do*.

[*A stone crashes through the window at NADYA's feet. She gives a little cry. There is a violent howl from outside.*]

NADYA (*suddenly furious, through clenched teeth*): You're quite right—I *do*! (*She picks up the stone, and before either KRISH or KERI can prevent her she rushes up the three steps and tears open the windows wide.*)

KRISH (*darting forward*): My God! Nadya!

[*There is a fresh yell on her appearance. Then with all her force she hurls the stone into the crowd. There is a loud cry of pain and then absolute silence.*]

NADYA (*contemptuously*): You idiots! You absolute idiots!

[*Someone in the crowd laughs hysterically. ZANA shrieks and hides her face.*]

Here I am entirely at your mercy. Please shoot or do something definite.

[*There is a pause. Someone shouts something unintelligible, then silence again.*]

You are not very spirited, are you? Where are your leaders—hiding away in the shadows? Tell them to come out and give an account of themselves.

[*Another pause.*]

Perhaps you are being fair-minded. Perhaps this silence is to give me a chance to plead my cause; to say something in my own defence. If so, you are generous, but very, very foolish. I might lure you away from your grievances, play upon your sentimentality,

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win you over to my side a little if only I had the courage. I could lie to you from this balcony just as effectively as your agitators have lied to you in the public parks and taverns, but it would only muddle and confuse you more than ever, and I am too tired and too bitterly angry to make the effort. You have failed me utterly all along the line. You are even failing me now by being so chicken-hearted and indefinite. I expected to find the people of Kraya faithful to their ideals and secure in their convictions. I found neither ideals nor convictions. Nothing but discontent, resentment and disloyalty. I have given up so much for you, now you can do a small service for me. I don't want to live any longer. Here is the chance you have been waiting for, if only you have the courage to take it. For a whole year, ever since I came to the throne, you have been boiling up for this hour, this supreme moment. The Queen standing before you alone, a target to be shot at, to die without ceremony or prayers or dignity. Shoot now and see what happens. I will die so quickly for you. You needn't be afraid of the sight of blood, there won't be any, only sawdust. I will just crumple up, humiliated and grotesque, like a rag doll.

[KERI walks negligently up and stands by her side; he is still smoking. There is a murmur from the crowd.]

Go in—go in! Not you too—it isn't worth it! (*With a catch in her voice*) Oh, what a silly, silly revolution!

KERI (*gently*): Why don't you all go home to bed?

[There is a sort of laugh at this, then someone starts singing the National Anthem. It is quickly taken up by the rest. NADYA turns away wearily and leans against the window. KERI comes in, and turning at the foot of the steps, waits for her. A first ray of sunlight suddenly shines on to her face, she puts up her arm to shield her eyes. The National Anthem continues rather disjointedly as the people are moving away.]

NADYA (*wearily*): I'm too tired for any more now, but remember one thing—afterwards. I ask you, humbly, in the name of your own dear heart's desire—to forgive me. . . .

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KERI: Forgive you? I don't understand.

[KRISH and ZANA rush off into bedroom—after a moment KRISH returns. There is the sound of a shot from the bedroom. NADYA puts her hand to her mouth for an instant as though to prevent herself from screaming. Then she bows her head.

KRISH (*in doorway*): Your Majesty, a man has been shot trying to get in at your window. Do you see? A man has been shot trying to get in at your window.

KERI *sinks on one knee and kisses her hand.*

NADYA: Now you understand.

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